

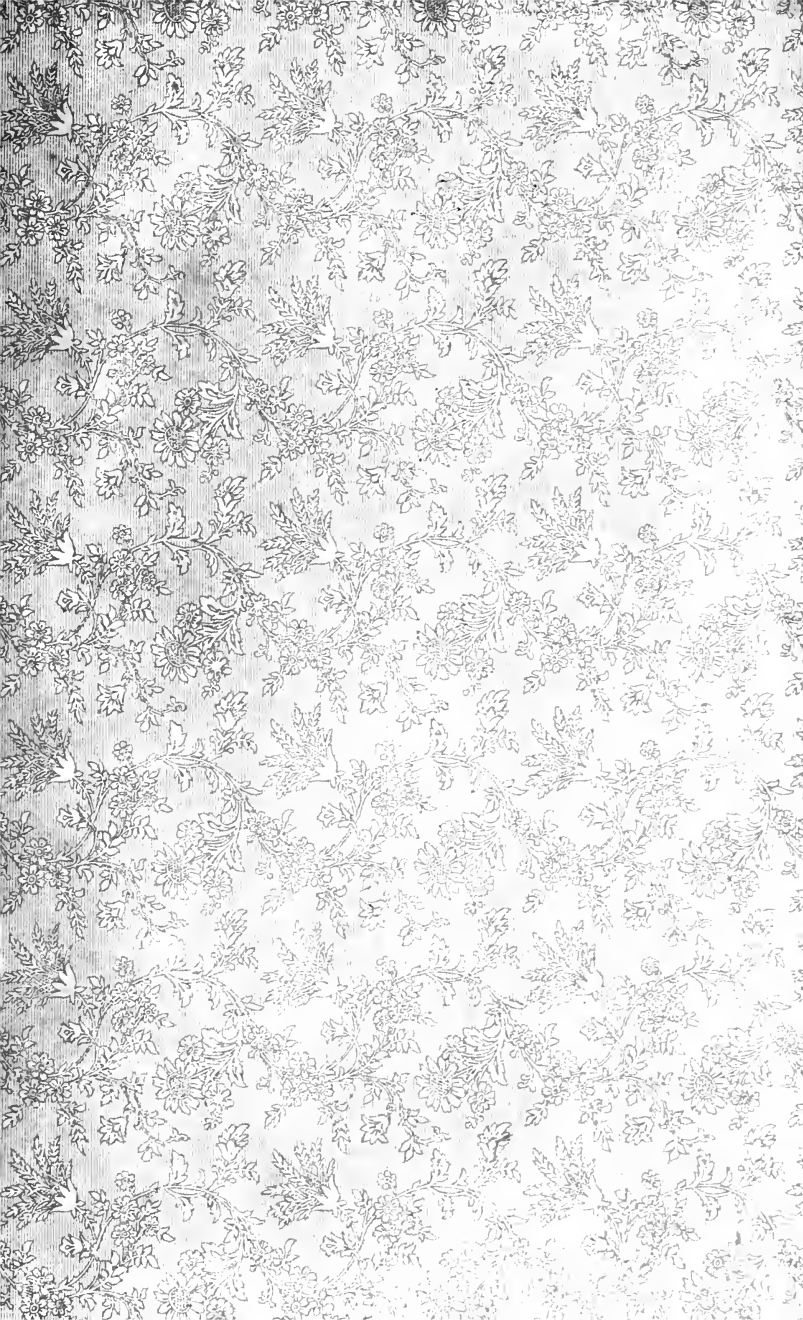


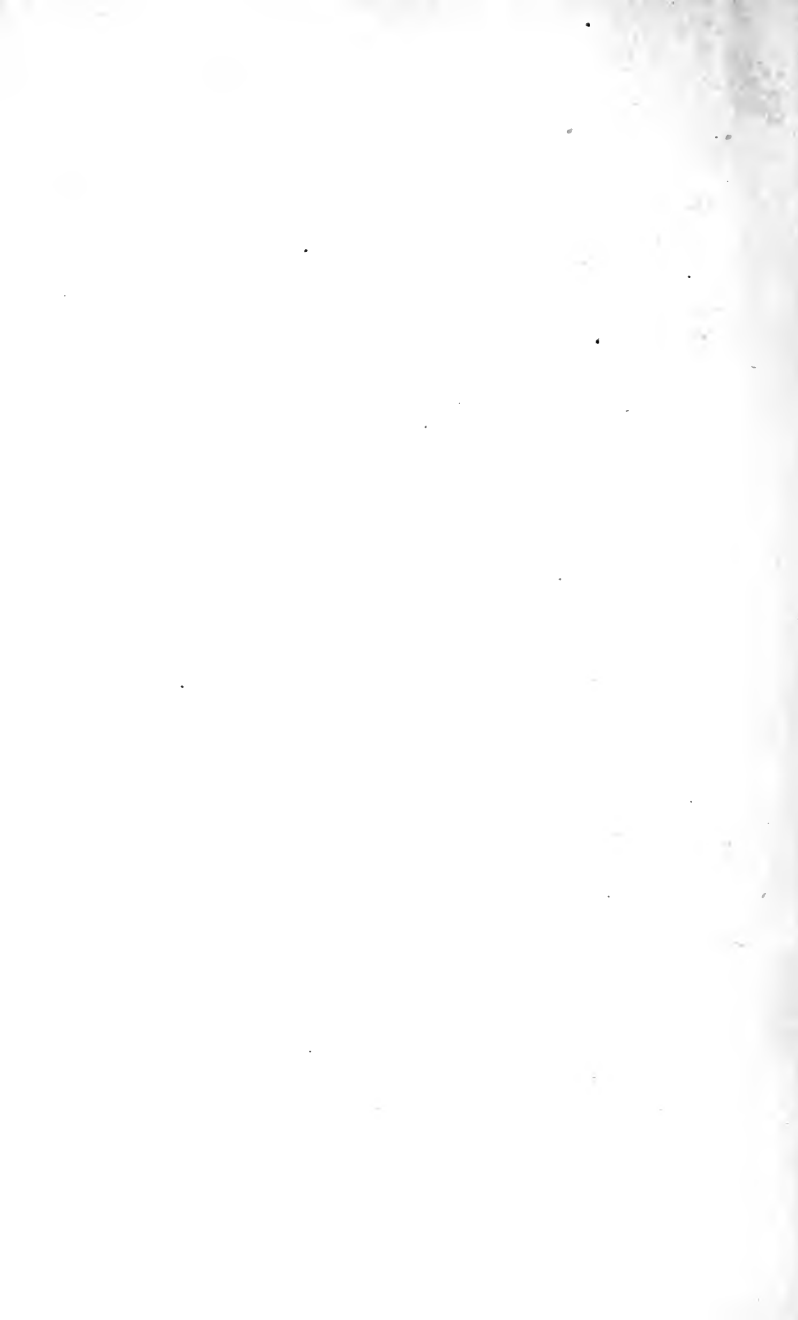
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THE RIVAL QUEENS

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BY

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Author of "Curly:—An Actor's Story" "Memoirs of Samuel Phelps"
"Reminiscences of Charles Reade" &c

"And one was far apart, and one was near :
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass !
And one was water, and one star was fire,
And one will ever shine, and one will pass,
Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere !"

TENNYSON

VOL III

London

REMINGTON AND CO PUBLISHERS

HENRIETTA STREET COVENT GARDEN

1887

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CONTENTS.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	In Hades (Day the First)	1
II.	'Twixt Life and Death	9
III.	How the News reached Me	22
IV.	In Hades (Day the Second)	29
V.	In Hades (Day the Third)	38
VI.	Practical James	45
VII.	"The Black Hole"	51
VIII.	Out of Hades	66
IX.	Laudate!	83
X.	Doctor Clerehead	92
XI.	The Bird has Flown	98

BOOK THE SIXTH.

I.	Drifting away	115
II.	The Duke	122
III.	Westward Ho!	134
IV.	The Parson's Adventure at Carlisle	144
V.	Sundered	160

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

I.	I am a Successful Dramatist	165
II.	The Strollers	173
III.	Clerehead gets his Congé... ..	186
IV.	The Picture	197
V.	Found!	211
VI.	Brown—"No. 5"... ..	223
VII.	United	234

EPILOGUE.

At Last	249
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BOOK THE FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

IN HADES (DAY THE FIRST).

“A prison ! oh, how I loathe the hateful name,
The grave to honest men—the sink of shame.”

FORTUNATELY for Herbert he slept through the whole of his first night in prison till the clock struck six, when the noise awoke him. It was still dark. At first he only knew that he was cold and damp, and trembling as with an ague, but he had not the slightest idea where he was. Presently a gong thundered

forth "Bang, bong ! Bang, bong !" for fully five minutes. Still he remained dazed and shivering.

Five minutes later, he heard footsteps approaching, then a halt. The light of a bull's-eye flashed through the small grated trap in the door, and a gruff voice roared out —

"No. 75, wake up !"

In a moment he remembered all—he was a prisoner !

No time was permitted for further reflection. The door of the cell was thrown open, and one of his acquaintances of the preceding night, said in a loud, imperious voice —

"Now then, stir your stumps, and turn out !"

Mechanically he obeyed, and stepped into the corridor amongst thirty or forty poor wretches, more or less unfortunate, than himself. The door of his cell was bolted and barred behind him, and he was led away with

the others, to a place they called the gentlemen debtors' ward.

This was a spacious room with a concrete floor, some strips of cocoa-nut matting, a large oblong wooden table, a few dilapidated wooden chairs, some forms, a Bible, a printed list of the prison regulations pasted on the wall, and a high window, through which, by standing on a form, "our honourable friends of the lower house" (as one of the "gentlemen debtors" facetiously designated the felons) could be seen marching by, taking their morning "constitutional."

The warder in charge, led Herbert to a sort of scullery, in which there was a large rough trough, and several wooden buckets filled with water. A bath was also pointed out to him, filled with something which looked like gravy soup, though it scarcely smelt so savoury. Fortunately he was spared that loathsome ordeal, although the pauper debtors, as a rule, were compelled to submit to it.

Provided with a coarse towel, and a piece of soap, he improvised the best toilette he could under the circumstances.

Returning to the large room, he found his fellow lodgers preparing their breakfast. Some were making coffee, some tea and toast, some were frying herrings or frizzling bacon, and all were seasoning their preparations with highly-flavoured jokes, or playful little blasphemies.

Two or three men sat apart, silent and sorrowful, evidently conscious of their degradation, but the majority were *canaille*, who seemed rather to enjoy the situation.

Fortunately no one had recognized Herbert. One fellow enquired in an audible whisper —

“Who’s the swaddy? Ain’t he a swell? Pity a cove like that can’t have a ward all to hisself.”

Grateful for small mercies, poor Jack was thankful, that he was at least unknown to these dreadful people.

At eight o'clock the warder beckoned him out, and conducted him to breakfast in the paupers' ward, where he found a pint of water-gruel, and four ounces of brown bread before him.

It will be remembered that he had just recovered from a dangerous illness, and was yet suffering from the effects of last night's drenching.

"I can't eat this," he said.

"You'll get nothing else here," the warder replied.

Without a word Herbert rose and followed the man back to the gentlemen debtors' ward.

By this time breakfast was in full blast, and Jack had time to notice his fellow-prisoners.

He was more particularly struck with the appearance of three men who were not breakfasting with the rest.

The one was a fair, slender, consumptive-looking young man, who told him in the course of the day, that he was an artist (a lithographer, I think he said). The other, was a venerable old gentleman of seventy and upwards—white-haired and white-bearded—a man who had evidently known better days. It added to Herbert's own sufferings to see the hopeless, helpless misery of these two poor creatures.

The third—a greasy, slimy-looking mountain of flesh of fifty or sixty—from his seedy, semi-clerical garb, was evidently a broken-down parson. This ornament of the Church kept perpetually dodging about like a cormorant, and poking his dirty fingers into every man's mess. All was fish that came to his net. He snatched a crust of bread here, a morsel of bacon, or a scrap of fish there, a lump of sugar everywhere, devouring them with wolfish avidity. As for the cups of tea and coffee he guzzled, it was impossible to

count them, but, numerous as they were, his insatiate maw "had stomach for them all."

Evidently this creature was the all-licensed buffoon of the goodly company. He buzzed about like a lazy blue-bottle, and, wherever he moved, a roar of ribald laughter greeted his full-flavoured witticisms, based principally upon copious quotations from the Song of Solomon, which he interpreted in the most literal and secular fashion, to the intense delight of his hearers. When he had stuffed his huge paunch as full as it could hold without absolutely bursting, he waddled to a corner, of which he had apparently the monopoly, and tumbled off to sleep like a gorged boa-constrictor.

At half-past ten, everybody was marshalled for prayers. Herbert fell in amongst the rest. Strict silence was enjoined. They were marched along like felons, and when they reached the church they were placed in pews,

merely separated from their "honourable friends" by a wooden partition.

After church, walking exercise followed in the grounds; then he was taken to the paupers' dinner at half-past two o'clock.

The *menu* consisted of four ounces of suet pudding, the like of brown bread, and two ounces of boiled potatoes. At the sight he turned away again without a word.

Church once more in the afternoon, then back to the ward to sit alone—always alone—his sense of delicacy and even decency wounded to the quick, by the swinish herd around him.

At eight he was taken to his cell, and locked up for the night.

Again "great Nature's second course" came to his help, and sealed his eyes, and soothed his tortured brain.

Thus ended his first day in Hades!

CHAPTER II.

'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH.

“ Make a fire within.

Fetch hither all my boxes in my closet ;
Death may usurp on nature many hours,
And yet the fire of life kindle again
The o'er-pressed spirits.”

MEANWHILE, what had become of Clara ?

Night had gone down in storm and tempest, but the day arose in cloudless sunshine, yet there she lay, even where she had fallen hours before, cold and motionless, and, to all appearance, dead as stone.

The clock struck six; the city was alive and stirring. Presently a man of middle age,

poorly clad, apparently a navigator, but with that indescribable swing which denotes a sailor, came rolling along the street, which ran parallel with the left-hand side of the prison.

Mick Cassidy, for so he was called, was smoking a cutty pipe; he carried a pickaxe and a spade on his left shoulder, and in his right hand was a small bass, which contained some workman's tools and his frugal breakfast. Judging from his dilapidated garments and his pinched and weather-beaten face, poor Mick's lines had not been cast in pleasant places of late.

As he entered the main street, on which the front of the jail abutted, turning sharply to the right, he nearly stumbled over the prostrate figure, which lay before him. As he started back, the pickaxe and the spade fell from his shoulder, and he dropped the bass, which contained his humble commissariat.

"Holy St. Patrick!" he exclaimed, "what's this? It's a woman, shure. P'raps

she was afther liftin' her finger wanst too often, last night. Well! they all do it; it's a family failin'! The poor craytures are fond of barley. Anyhow, she'll take no harm in the sunshine, d—l a bit!

“She'll sleep it off, and be as right as a trivet in an hour or two.”

As he stooped to take up his pickaxe and spade, he caught sight of a satin slipper, a silk stocking, and the daintiest foot and ankle in the world, peeping out of an embroidered petticoat, all bestained with rain, and be-draggled with mire.

“Mother of mercies!” he exclaimed “what's this?” And the dear fellow (a man, I dare swear, every inch of him!) whipped off his miserable slop, and covered up the dear little foot and ankle as if they were relics of the Madonna; then gently lifting up the shawl and cloak, and seeing the face and form beneath, he continued—“Oh! look at the pearls and the goold! But what are they to the

pearls in her mouth, and the goold in her hair? Oh! luk at the hands of her! and the arms of her! and the neck of her! and the face of her! The face, that's like the face of our Blessed Lady herself!"

He felt her wrists, and placed his ear to her neck, till he heard the faint pulsation of her heart still beating.

"The Lord be praised!" he cried. "She's not dead this time, anyhow."

He took off his jacket and waistcoat and wrapped them round his bass, and placed them tenderly beneath her head. This done, he went to the prison-door to ring for help. Unfortunately, the handle, as we know, was gone.

"Wirras thrue! What'll I do now? Shure it's the polis I'd betther be afther." And turning towards the town, by accident, he kicked before him a small purple morocco purse, with the initials "C.T." in gold.

"Murther in Irish! What's this?"

He opened the purse, found in it three

Bank of England notes for £100 each, and, half a dozen sovereigns or more. Standing still for a moment, he scratched his head as he muttered —

“Winther’s comin’ on. Nora’s perishing for want of a shawl, and the childher’s feet are on the ground. Next week the rint’s due, and just wan o’ thim bits of paper ’d make a man o’ me.”

He paused, irresolute for a moment, then he resumed —

“Make a man ’o me? It’s a scoundhrel it ’d make o’ me—a miserable sthrawneen that ’d never dare to luk the wife and childher in the face agin.”

With that, he ran off in the direction of the city.

In a few minutes he returned with a smart, intelligent policeman, who took stock of the situation at once.

“Mick,” said he, “don’t you move nor stir from the spot till I come back.”

“ Be aisy ; d—I a fut will I stir out o’ this.”

By-and-bye, people began to dribble up, one by one, and two by two. At length, a crowd gathered round, but Mick mounted guard with his pick-axe, and they gave him a wide berth until the policeman returned with a stretcher, and a couple of his comrades. They “ bore her gently on the bier,” hiding her from the mob, and so carried her to the police-station.

The Chief Constable was a young Scotchman named Macdonald, just appointed to the post. Fortunately, for some seven or eight years previously, he had been at the head of the detective department at Rosemount.

“ Now what’s all this about ? ” he enquired.

Then plucking the shawl from the face of the recumbent figure, he exclaimed—

“ My God ! why it’s Miss Trevor ! ”

He waited for no explanation, but turning to the men he roared out —

“ Send for Dr. MacFarlane. Tell him to come as if the d—l were at his heels! Clear out!”

The men left the room as he called upstairs —

“ Mary, Mary! my love, come down; and tell Jeannie to bring hot water, mustard, brandy, flannel, burnt feathers, and deuce knows what all!”

Down comes a little, bright-eyed, fair woman, attended by a strapping, ginger-headed Scotch lassie. To their good offices Macdonald confides my darling, while he rejoins the men without, and demands an explanation. Then Mick Cassidy up and tells all he knows, handing over the purse and its contents.

Desiring the Inspector in charge to take the numbers of the notes, Macdonald called Mick aside and gave him a sovereign.

“ Here,” said he, “ don’t go to work to-day.

Go and get tight if you like, only don't make a beast of yourself, for if you're brought here you'll have to go before the beak. I shall keep my eye on you, and see you're well paid for this day's work. What's your name?"

"Cassidy—Mick Cassidy, sir."

"Let me shake hands with you. You're a fine fellow—a d—d fine fellow, Mr. Mick Cassidy. Good-bye; God bless you. Get out!"

At this moment the doctor arrived—a little man with a huge bald head, the eye of a hawk, and the beak of an eagle.

"What's up? What's up, Mac?" he inquired.

"Mac" told him all, and took him into the room where Clara lay, in charge of his bonnie little wife and her handmaiden. My poor dear's eyes were closed, her lips were blue, and her teeth were set like a vice.

The doctor felt her pulse, lifted her eyelids, and shook his head.

“Is there any hope?” enquired Macdonald.

“Leave the room, and I’ll see.”

When Mac left the room the doctor took out his instruments and cut the shoulder-band of the left arm of Clara’s dress. Placing a small glass tube beneath her armpit, he watched and waited a minute or two, then he withdrew the glass, looked at it, and smiled.

“Throw a shawl over her,” he said to the women; then he sang out, “Come in, Mac; it’s all right, my man.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” replied the other.

“Everything depends now on dispatch. The first thing to do is to get her to bed.”

“Oh! I can do that in twa minutes,” said Mrs. Macdonald. “Come awa, Jeannie woman, and gang ben, while I —”

Macdonald, with a tenderness and delicacy one would scarcely have expected, said —

“Nae, lassie, you’re used to this place, but

yon poor leddy could never live beneath the shadow o' these walls. We'd better get her awa at once. But you shall gang wi' her, my bonnie dearie, so slip on your bonnet.

"Would you mind going on, doctor, to the White Hart? Order whatever you want. Never mind the expense, I'm answerable for all! We'll be there in a quarter of an hour."

Away went the doctor.

In a few minutes he had secured the best rooms in the hotel—a large bedroom and drawing-room communicating with each other. By his directions the furniture was rapidly cleared away from the sitting-room. A mattress was placed upon the floor, covered with blankets, and by its side a large slipper bath filled with hot water, two or three huge sponges, and a footpan full of mustard and hot water.

Mrs. Ogilvie, the landlady, a fine, matronly, ladylike woman, was in waiting, attended by two chambermaids.

By this time Macdonald and his wife arrived in charge of Clara.

They had barely carried her upstairs, when a cab drove up, out of which sprang Mrs. Le Blanc and Thompson, the Claremount manager, in a dreadful state of excitement.

Of course Laura was dreadfully cut up when she saw Clara's condition, but she soon recovered, and made herself quite at home with the doctor, who at once constituted her head nurse.

"Ladies," said he, "this young creature's life depends on you. Only carry out my instructions without fuss or blether, and you'll be worth all the doctors in England. Now then, turn her gently on her face. Stand clear."

And he took a pair of scissors from his case, and with one dexterous sweep cut through Clara's dress from head to foot. He then went to the mustard and water, emptied some of it into the slipper bath, put his hand in.

“ Too hot,” he said ; “ give me that can of cold water. That’ll do. I’m now going to prepare a cold pack for her in the next room. Now, madam, attend”—this to Mrs. Le Blanc. “ Here’s my watch. Please keep your eye on it. First, you’ll put her in the slipper bath for ten minutes. Next, do you see this ?” and he emptied a small bottle of colourless fluid into a wash-hand basin, in which he placed a sponge. “ It’s an acid, and a dangerous one, so mind how you use it. When you take her out you will sponge her from head to foot with this, then cover her with a couple of blankets for five minutes, neither more nor less. Time it to the moment. Then sponge the acid out with water as hot as your hands can bear. As soon as you’ve done, bring her into the next room, where the pack will be ready, that is, Mrs. Macdonald, if you will give me a hand ?”

“ Baith hands, doctor,” replied the little woman, as she bustled off.

He paused on the threshold, as he said to Mrs. Le Blanc —

“ You understand me, madam ? ”

“ Perfectly.”

“ I feel I may rely on you.”

“ You may.”

“ Very well, then, go ahead.”

Although his instructions were carried out to the letter, for some hours the issue was doubtful; and the doctor himself scarcely knew whether it would be life or death.

“ I have done all that I can do,” he said;
“ the rest is in the hands of Heaven ! ”

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE NEWS REACHED ME.

“On Rumour’s tongues continual slanders ride.”

WHILE my darling lay oscillating ’twixt life and death, while my dearest friend was shivering and starving amongst those jail-birds, I was lounging in my easy-chair, in my cosy chambers, toasting my feet before the fire, sipping my tea, and trifling with my ham and eggs.

At this moment Mrs. Gibson, the house-keeper, brought in “The Daily Scorchers.” After glancing over the telegrams, the first

thing that caught my eye was the following sensational announcement :—

“ By Special Telegram from our own Correspondent.

RIOT AT A THEATRE.

GREAT DESTRUCTION OF LIFE AND
PROPERTY.

AN ACTOR ARRESTED UPON A CHARGE
OF ARSON AND MURDER.

SUICIDE OF MISS CLARA TREVOR!”

I could scarcely collect my senses to read what followed.

I have extracted this precious composition from my note-book, exactly as it appeared, and here it is :—

“ Last night, as Mr. Herbert, the tragedian, was on his way to the Theatre at Claremount to enact the part of Benedick, he was arrested upon a charge of arson and murder !

“ It is rumoured that the beautiful and accomplished Miss Trevor, who was devotedly attached to the wretched man, upon hearing of his arrest, immediately became distraught, and committed suicide !

“ It is certain that the unfortunate lady rushed off the stage in the midst of the performance, and was last seen running madly in the direction of the river, on the banks of which, her opera cloak was found, some hours later.

“The performance announced could not take place ; and in consequence of the refusal of the manager to return the audience their money, a riot ensued, amidst which the theatre was sacked, great destruction of property occurred, one man was killed, and seventy or eighty persons were wounded. A large body of police was called in, under the direction of Chief-Constable Handley, and after some time order was restored.”

One moment I stood dazed ; the next I was in the Strand, hailing the first cab ; half an hour later I was at King's Cross. Too late ! The express had just gone ! The next train did not leave town until five o'clock. I drove back to Clerehead's office ; he was not there, so I scrawled a hasty note telling him of my departure, and at five o'clock I started for Claremount.

Immediately on my arrival, I rushed to the theatre. It was closed ; but I gathered from the hall-porter, in addition to all the reader already knows, that Mrs. Le Blanc, and Thompson, the manager, had followed Clara to Bolingbroke, before I had even started

from town. There was some comfort in that.

The last train had left hours ago, so I could not get away until the morning. There was no help for it but to put up at the "King's Head."

Mrs. Jenkins gave me fuller and more accurate information about the unfortunate occurrences of the previous night ; and the poor old coachman, who had just got back, awfully knocked up, gave me the particulars of Clara's journey as far as he could.

I telegraphed Mrs. Le Blanc, who replied, "If you wish to see her alive, you have not a moment to lose."

I would have started there and then, but there was no possibility of obtaining a conveyance ; so I had to watch and wait until daybreak.

Oh, God ! that night of horrors ! I shall remember it, were my life to stretch out to "the crack of doom."

By the first train I was on my way to Bolingbroke. I thought that miserable railway journey would never end; it seemed as if I could have walked the distance in half the time.

At last! at last, I reach my destination. Scarcely waiting for the train to stop, I leap forth. The people evidently think me mad, for the crowd opens and gives way. I spring into the first conveyance. "The White Hart! the White Hart!" I cry.

The poor, bony old hack shies every minute, and can scarcely keep his legs as he struggles along before the miserable ramshackle shandrydan to which he is yoked.

Presently we emerge into the High Street, at the opposite end of which I see the sign of "The White Hart" flapping in the wind. I spring out, leaving my tardy charioteer to follow at his leisure. I run, fast as my legs can carry me, some three or four hundred paces to the inn.

As I approach the archway, a little, bright creature, with fair hair and smiling face, greets me; I learn afterwards she is Macdonald's wife. Bless her heart! She seems to know me instinctively, for she calls out —

“This way, sir, this way, Mr. Penarvon!”

She flies before me; her feet scarce touching the ground; I follow fast as she can lead up the broad staircase. I have no lameness now; by God's blessing that day I recovered the use of my disabled limb, and have never been lame since.

She stops at a door; on the threshold I encounter a little man, with a large bald head a huge aquiline nose, and keen bright eyes.

“The doctor!” cries my flying fairy.

“Only two words,” I say. “Is she alive?”

“Alive.”

“And safe?”

“Look!” says the doctor, as he throws the door wide open.

There stands Mrs. Le Blanc, a smile

upon her face, and there lies my darling, pale as death, but breathing placidly as an infant.

I grasp her soft, white hand in mine. Thank God! it is warm and full of life. I cover it with kisses, I moisten it with tears; I fall upon my knees beside her, and my heart wells forth in prayers of gratitude to Him who has snatched her from the jaws of death and given her back to me.

CHAPTER IV.

IN HADES (DAY THE SECOND).

“I hear it—I see it, but it’s a prodigy that nature can’t believe.”

THAT very morning at six o’clock, an hour before I started for Bolingbroke, Herbert had to undergo the ordeal of the preceding day ; only this time, they did not go through the ceremony of inviting him to breakfast, even in the paupers’ ward.

He asked if there was a letter for him ; there was none. He sat and brooded and wondered how they had got on at the theatre the previous night ; if Clara had received his

note, and why he had not heard from her, or the manager. The more he thought over the matter, the less explicable did it appear.

Previous to going to church, a strange man came into the ward, accompanied by one of the turnkeys who had escorted Herbert to his cell on his arrival.

"Any new arrivals?" enquired the stranger, in a somewhat abrupt and imperious tone.

"Yes," said Herbert, springing to his feet, "I believe I am the last arrival."

The man looked at him from head to foot, and then enquired of the turnkey —

"Do you know anything of this person?"

"Yes, sir," replied the fellow; "he was drunk and disorderly when he was brought in."

"A lie!" retorted Herbert, in indignant amazement.

"My good man," said the stranger, "that is not the way to speak to an officer in discharge of his duty; when you have learnt proper language, I'll listen to you."

“ But I want to see someone in authority,” exclaimed Herbert, as the door was slammed in his face ; and the stranger, whoever he was, left the room.

Half-past ten—church again.

About that very moment, finding Clara out of danger, I enquired for poor Jack, but Mrs. Le Blanc could give me no information beyond the fact that he had been arrested, and was, she believed, in Bolingbroke Gaol.

Just then I had a message from Mr. Thompson, the manager, who was waiting to see me in the coffee-room.

The little man was sorely distressed, and explained his position with as much delicacy as possible, taking care, however, to impress upon my mind very decidedly, that as Clerehead had made the engagement, he, (Thompson) would be compelled to hold him responsible for its fulfilment. I explained to him, that I should only be too happy to do

all I possibly could to aid him, and that, in point of fact, I was then on my way, to arrange for Herbert's immediate release.

We walked down to the prison together.

Upon explaining our business to "Red-head," he gruffly replied that Herbert was certainly in prison, but beyond that he knew nothing.

"Could we see him?"

"Certainly not, without a justice's order. It was not visiting day till Monday next."

"Could we see the Governor?"

"No; he was out for a drive."

We could elicit nothing more, except a few gruff monosyllables.

Thompson, who knew his way about better than I did, tried the fellow with half-a-sovereign, upon which he thawed directly, and told us the amount for which Herbert was incarcerated, and even undertook to deliver a letter to him.

By this time the debt had reached a hundred pounds.

I had not a hundred shillings about me, so we went direct to the Telegraph Office, and I wired Clerehead, to send me a cheque. In an hour's time, I got a reply from him, simply desiring me to meet him at Bolingbroke Station, on the morrow, at three o'clock.

While I was arranging for Jack's deliverance, he was being marched, once more, to the paupers' ward.

Again the same cruel farce of dinner, again his gorge—all hungered as he was—rose at the filthy fare.

He was absolutely dying of starvation, while I was within a few hundred yards of his prison, "eating of the fat and drinking of the sweet," yet absolutely debarred, from coming near, or helping him, in any way. Even the very letter which I left for him, had to pass through some precious red-tape ordeal, and was not permitted to be

delivered until the next day, when, as will be seen, it was too late to be of service.

At this time poor Jack must have died, had not a good Samaritan, in the shape of a gigantic railway engine driver, taken compassion on him. This man had been committed for contempt of court, because he refused to pay a bill, which his stupid, thriftless wife had run up for some shoddy stuff, with a scoundrel of a tallyman.

Dick Griffiths, as he was called, was a rough diamond, but he had a heart of gold. Fortunately, he was the only man in all the place who recognized Herbert. He was a Castletown lad, had seen Jack act repeatedly, and the honest fellow's heart bled to see him in this place.

Now Dick was just in the act of preparing his dinner, when Herbert, faint and famished, staggered back into the gentlemen-debtors' ward. There he sat with his arms folded on his chest, shivering and shrinking, but look-

ing at Griffiths' preparation with curious, but hungry eyes.

Indeed, at that moment, honest Dick was an interesting study.

On the table is a large pewter pot of stout, a couple of plates, a small wire gridiron, a new quartern loaf, a pat of butter, and a huge beefsteak.

Dick is preparing half-a-dozen large kidney potatoes, and placing them on the fire to boil. He then takes from his pocket, a small writing ruler, with which he hammers away at the steak, until he has apparently reduced it to a proper state of tenderness. This done, he salts and peppers it to his satisfaction, then down it goes in the gridiron, on the fire, and down go the plates beside it.

As he manipulates the steak, its delicious odour impermeates the whole place. The potatoes are boiling; it is really a supreme moment.

The porpoise-like parson, wakes up lazily,

eagerly sniffs the savoury mess, smacks his lips, and casts a lustful eye on the banquet! Dick takes the potato-pan, says pleasantly, but gravely, (under the circumstances one might almost have been tempted to say "gravily!") —

"Mates, I'm goin' to strain my magnum bonums, and that man as goes puttin' his nose into my pewter, or bobbin' round my cooking apparatus, him and me, has got to come to cues, when I come back; that's all."

During his absence no man ventures to go near either his pewter or his "apparatus."

He comes back quickly, places the pan on the fire, sprinkles a little salt over the potatoes, puts a coarse towel atop, to absorb the steam, gives the steak another gentle turn, and produces a knife and fork. Deftly dropping the meat on one of the plates, he puts half the butter over it, and finishes up artistically, with another sprinkle of pepper and salt. Having placed the banquet on the

table, he divides the huge steak into two equal parts, putting one half on one plate, and retaining the second half on the other ; then turning round to Herbert, and politely taking his cap off, he says —

“ Now, then, your honour, beggin’ your pardon, you and me has got to dine together to-day ; that’s what we’ve got to do, if you ain’t offended, and I ain’t too bold ?

“ Was there anybody a-larfin’ there ? ’Cos by-and-bye I’m coming round to leave my card.”

But no one was laughing ; they knew better.

The two men fell to, with an appetite. Herbert thought he had never tasted anything so delicious in his life ; so, thanks to honest Dick Griffiths, Jack did not die of starvation that day.”

Eight o’clock came ; again the cell ; again the blessed balm of sleep.

So ended his second day in Hades !

CHAPTER V.

IN HADES (DAY THE THIRD).

“Can such things be?”

NEXT morning, as usual, Jack was routed out at six o'clock; this time he was introduced to a new experience.

Outside the cell stood the two warders of the first night. One of them bawled out —

“This way, 75.”

“75” followed quietly and without a word into the scullery, where one of the turnkeys peremptorily ordered him to take a bucket of water and carry it out.

“Are you mad—or am I?” demanded Herbert.

Dick Griffiths, who was being put to the same task, whispered —

“Don’t rile ’em, cap’n, or the beasts can make it hot for you. I’ll carry your bucket, and see what’s goin’ to turn up—anyhow, we shall be together, and you and me’s a match for more than half-a-dozen of these waistrels, any day in the week.”

So saying, he took up the two buckets of water.

One warder strutted before, Griffiths came next; Herbert, half-dazed, followed as if in a dream, while the other turnkey brought up the rear.

In a few minutes they reached a distant corridor, where they found the poor artist and the venerable white-headed old gentleman before referred to, upon their knees scrubbing and holy-stoning the stone flags and steps of the ——!

Herbert's heart revolted at the sight, and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

What could it all mean? Were these men convicts? Was he a felon?

He was not kept long in doubt. One of his jailors said —

“Yesterday you wanted to see ‘someone in authority;’ well, here is someone in authority.”

And he indicated a great obese person, in a sort of military undress, who was seated on a high wooden stool, with his legs crossed, his arms folded, his back leaning against the corner of an office of some kind which stood exactly in the centre of the passage. The man was almost as broad as he was long; he had the eyes and hair of an Albino, the face of an owl, an enormous head, and no neck to speak of; his back and chest protruded in equal proportions—suggesting a gigantic caricature of our old friend Punch. His legs

swayed lazily to and fro, while he affectionately nursed his folded arms, resting each elbow in the palm of the opposite hand.

This gentleman was Major Whelks, the Governor. Herbert thought he was by no means a pleasant person to look at.

Beside him, note-book and pencil in hand, stood a man in prison uniform, almost as peculiar-looking as the Governor himself. This was Jinks, his second in command, a stalwart, black scrub-bearded six-footer, who stood as if he had a ramrod up his back, and who had the most remarkable snub nose ever seen on human countenance.

The Albino blinked his eyes at Herbert and Griffiths, and said, in a harsh, imperious voice —

“Nos. 75 and 92, take off your coats! Do you hear? Take off your coats!”

“Take off my coat!” said Herbert.
“For what?”

The Major had a peculiar habit of yelping, "What! what! what!" or "Tut! tut!"

Whenever he was "gravelled for lack of matter," out came one or other of his favourite interjections; so he roared out —

"What! what! what! Prisoners dare talk to me! Tut! tut! Off with your coat! Do your dooty, sirrah!"

"Duty!" echoed Herbert.

"Yes, sir. Dooty, sir! dooty! What! what! what! It's your turn, 75, and yours, 92, to do your share of the scrubbing, and brushing, and holy-stoning; so you'd better look alive about it."

Herbert didn't deign to reply, but he turned pale; so did Griffiths. When brave men turn pale, it is a bad look out for those who make or meddle with them.

The Governor thought they showed the white feather, so he beckoned the two turnkeys, and told them to bring out from an adjacent closet, a couple of scrubbing-brushes

and a couple of pieces of holy-stone. Then he said, "Now strip them."

"No, thank you," said Griffiths; "I prefer to strip myself."

So saying, he quietly took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and stooped to the bucket of water.

The two turnkeys now advanced to seize Herbert, but, before they could lay hands on him, a vigorous undercut from his left fist, lifted the one literally off his feet, and landed him on his back; and a terrific right-hander, straight from the shoulder, sent the other sprawling to the opposite end of the corridor.

As soon as they could regain their feet, and recover their senses, away they ran, bawling, "Murder! mutiny! murder!"

Meanwhile, Griffiths had not stooped to the bucket for nothing. With one dexterous movement he soused the Albino from head to foot, with another he sent the bucket flying until it cannoned on the black-bearded

fellow's snout, and dropped him flat as a flounder.

The artist and the old gentleman paused in their ignoble occupation, and looked upon the conflict with eager and sympathetic interest.

The Major, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog coming from the water, roared out his everlasting "What! what! what!" Then he blew a shrill whistle, and roared, "Mutiny! murder!"

From the other end of the corridor came a gang of warders and turnkeys; then ensued a hand-to-hand fight.

In vain did Herbert and Griffiths bowl over their opponents like ninepins; they were over-matched—ten to one. In the end, they were beaten and bludgeoned into senselessness, and flung into the Black Hole!

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL JAMES.

“An ounce of common sense, is worth a cartload of sentiment.”

Punctual to the moment, as three o'clock struck, Clerehead arrived at Bolingbroke.

As he jumped out of the train, he exclaimed—

“Oh! there you are, Bob. Just read this; then imagine, if you can, what a healthy time I had of it, till I got your telegram.”

He then thrust into my hands the last edition of “The Daily Scorchers,” in which I read as follows :—

“AWFUL TRAGEDY AT BOLINGBROKE.

“From our own Correspondent.

“The mystery which enshrouded the disappearance of Mr. Herbert and Miss Trevor from Claremount has at length been unravelled. At daybreak on Tuesday morning, the unfortunate lady, who was attired in the magnificent stage costume, &c., worn in the part of Beatrice on the preceding night, was found, drenched to the skin from the tempest of the preceding night, and perfectly lifeless, lying on the steps of the County Jail here.

“A richly-embroidered purse, containing upwards of three thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, was discovered near the body!

The corpse was immediately removed to the Police Station. A post-mortem examination will be held to-morrow, and the inquest will follow in due course.

“Mrs. Le Blanc, the eminent authoress, and Mr. Thompson, manager of the Theatre Royal, Claremount, arrived here at midday on Tuesday to take charge of the remains of the deceased; and Mr. Robert Penarvon, the celebrated dramatist, came down last night, by special train, to superintend the preparations for the funeral.

“The Mayor, the Mayoress, and the Rector of St. Asaph’s have called on Mrs. Le Blanc and Mr. Penarvon to offer their condolences on the melancholy occasion.”

SECOND EDITION.

“Our correspondent telegraphs, that on the news of Miss Trevor’s death being communicated to Mr. Herbert, who, at present, is immured in Bolingbroke Jail; the unfortunate gentleman, whose mental condition has of late

occasioned his friends much anxiety, became violently insane, and has been placed under restraint in the lunatic ward of the jail infirmary."

My first feeling was one of rage. "Could I only come across 'our own correspondent,' and lay my stick across his shoulders!" I exclaimed.

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied Clerehead; "he must live. You've never been a penny-a-liner, and don't know what it is to want copy. I do, and I've a fellow-feeling for this poor d—, although he has given me fits, for the past four-and-twenty hours. Simmer down, and tell me all about it."

As we walked to the White Hart, I related all that had occurred, as far as I knew it myself.

"Poor Herbert!" said Clerehead, "he's always in hot water. As for being in quod, that's nothing—at least, not when you are used to it. A friend of mine, used to take up his winter quarters, regularly, for years, at White Cross Street, and he was quite *désolé* when that

ancient landmark was removed. As to going off his "nut," I don't think Jack Herbert is such an ass, as to do that for any woman, dead or alive. Anyhow, we'll soon have him out; if we don't, it will be a bad look out for Orpheus. Of course you know La Challoner didn't act last night?"

"Good Heavens! You don't say so!"

"I do, though, worse luck. A message came for me to go to Morley's at five yesterday afternoon. I found her in convulsions, and that infernal paper crushed in a lump upon the floor. I sent for Beaver, who certified she would be unable to act for a week, 'in consequence of a domestic calamity.' I thought that the neatest way to put it. Then I had to cut back to the shop to arrange for a change of programme."

"What did you fall back on?"

"Oh! 'The Masher's Début,' 'The Critic,' and 'The Fool and the Fiddler.'"

"But they have never acted 'The Critic.'"

"No, that rendered it more interesting. They were 'apt, very apt; defective in nothing but words, phrases, and grammar.'

"They went on, and read their parts.

"It was altogether a lively exhibition. Puff held the book, and when they stuck he prompted, and when he stuck, the prompter prompted him, in fact the prompter was the most prominent performer. I don't think I ever laughed so much in my life."

"Did the audience laugh?"

"No, they didn't; that was the best of the joke; they hissed! hissed as furiously as the geese who saved the Capitol. If they hadn't done so, we shouldn't have known they were there, without the aid of a microscope."

"The house was not very good, then?"

"Oh! I suppose we rang up to about forty bob and finished to a 'fiver.'

“ But here we are at the hotel. First give me a glass of Madeira and a biscuit for I’m famished, next tell me all about La Belle Trevor, and then we’ll get poor Jack out of chokey.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ THE BLACK HOLE.”

“ Darkness and devils ! ”

THE door of “ The Black Hole ” was roughly thrown open, and two pitchers of water, with two hunks of brown bread, were thrust in ; then, the door was closed with a bang, which shook the place.

The noise recalled Griffiths to life ; but Herbert remained as one dead.

Honest Dick had not the most distant idea where he was, or how long he had been unconscious. It might have been a minute, an

hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, an age for aught he knew.

In reality his swoon had extended barely two hours !

His first sensation of returning consciousness, was one dull throb of pain, occasioned by his aching bones.

As a rule, he invariably slept like a top. On Sunday, which was really a day of rest to him, he always slept till mid-day, and then, even when the noonday sun streamed in, he had the power to keep his eyes almost hermetically sealed. Through being endowed with this happy faculty, and having, as he used to say, eyelids tanned by the wind and the fiery breath of the engine, until they were opaque as leather, he did not at first discern the depth of the darkness which environed him. He did, however, realize that he was lying somewhere on the bare stones, and that there was a certain unaccustomed density in the air. Then he opened his eyes. Of course

he could see nothing. He put his hands up before him ; but the darkness did not increase, in fact it could not, it was so intensely dark already.

Ah ! then it leaped through his mind at once—the struggle—the fight ; he was immured in the " Black Hole ! "

If he were only free ; if he were only once more amongst those cowards, he would let them see !

See ? See what ? Great Heavens ! He can't see the hand before him.

This darkness is not the darkness of the ordinary night ; it is the Egyptian darkness, which can be felt, the darkness of the everlasting stagnation of the tomb !

The poor wretch is unnerved and horror-stricken.

He had heard of the " Black Hole " at Calcutta. He had read, " It's Never too late to Mend ! "

He had sympathized with the sufferings of

poor Tom Robinson ; his heart had responded with honest indignation, to the eloquent and impassioned protests of the great writer.

How well he recalled when and where he had first read the story.

He had borrowed the book from the library of the Mechanics' Institute at Castletown ; had played truant and run away to a green field by the river, where he lay the whole long summer day devouring the enthralling narrative, swallowing every word of it, until night surprised him.

How hungry he was. He had eaten nothing but a bit of bread and an apple all day.

When he got home his father gave him a hiding ; but his mother, bless her heart, brought his supper up to his bedside.

Next day the schoolmaster gave him another thrashing. Psha ! what did he care for that ? All the licking in the world couldn't beat George Fielding, and Susan Merton, Isaac

Levi, John Meadows, Tom Robinson, and Jackey out of his brains.

He remembered also, that, a few weeks afterwards, the play, founded upon the book, was announced, "first time on any stage" (yes, even *before* it was acted in London!), at the Castletown Theatre!

It was produced under the superintendence of the author himself, and Tom begged or borrowed sixpence, and fought his way through the crowd with another boy, a chubby-cheeked Anglo-Russian (who has since become a popular dramatist, and a London manager!) into the "top hoyle."

So far his memory soared through time and space, but his eye could see nothing.

There is a limit, however, even to the potency of darkness, and his mind's eye now saw clearly enough, the stalwart, leonine author in the private box, to the left, of the stage.

Again, he saw poor Tom Robinson, engaged

in the terrific struggle with the warders, as they sought to drag him into the Hell Hole below. And now, after all these years, he was in the Black Hole himself. Yes, there he was sure enough ; there could be no doubt about that !

But where was his comrade in misfortune all this time ?

“ Cap’n, Cap’n ! are you there ? ” he asks.

All is silent ; there is no answer. He hears nothing, nothing save the beating of his own heart.

The silence enhances the horror.

He tries to recollect how long poor Robinson was immured. Was it six, or twelve, or twenty-four hours, or was it forty-eight ? He can’t remember.

Being in an agony of pain, and burning with fever, he is parched with thirst, and famished with hunger. Oh ! for meat and drink !

As he involuntarily extends his feet they

come in contact with some slight obstacle which turns over, and, as it falls, emits a hollow sound.

What can it be?

He leans forward and feels with outstretched hands.

It is one of the pitchers of water, he has overthrown.

Ha! what's this he feels within his grasp? Bread! Bread!

He tears it to pieces and devours it ravenously.

The pangs of hunger are partially assuaged, but he is now consumed with a raging thirst. He extends his body on the ground, face downwards. In his agony, he thrusts his parched tongue into the crevices of the stone in the futile effort, to lick up some drops of the precious liquid, which is running to waste on the foul floor. At this moment, his outstretched hand comes in contact with the other pitcher. God be praised!

the generous, life-giving fluid is within his grasp.

No traveller over the parched plains of Sahara could ever greet the oasis in the desert, with more gratitude, than our poor, fevered engine-driver, the discovery of that jar of water, in the darkness of his prison.

He now takes heart of grace, and tries to laugh himself out of his fears; he invokes the aid of "Old King Cole, the jolly old soul, and his fiddlers three."

It's no use—King Cole is an impostor. Neither he nor his fiddlers are of the slightest use in the present emergency, and poor Dick is more despondent than ever.

His distempered imagination now conjures up another horror—in fact, a succession of horrors.

Bolingbroke Jail has been in existence since the time of the Conquest. In ages gone by, a Royal favourite, a profligate Queen's paramour, had been done to death

within these gloomy walls ; a King of England had been left there to die of famine ! Their bones may be lying festering and mouldering here, around him and about him. He may stumble through a death-trap, and be engulfed in some slimy, horrent abyss beneath his feet !

At this moment he sees, or thinks he sees, two rays of phosphorescent light gleaming through the darkness.

It must be remembered that, though physically brave, with the bulldog's brute courage, this man was a poor, ignorant fellow.

Many a time, when a child, he had been "put into the dark corner for being naughty ;" many a time had he been terrorized by the threat of sending "Bogy" to him in night and darkness. Nay, more, his spiritual pastors and masters (dear creatures !) had taught him to believe implicitly in the material existence of "Bogy"—a great, black, grisly brute, with bristling hairs, and horns, and hoofs, and tail,

with breath of flame and eyes of fire. And now the beast had come ! Yes, there he was opposite, with his blazing orbs, waiting to spring upon him, and drag him down—down to the everlasting lake of fire and brimstone !

For a moment Dick's heart stood still ; then his Island blood was all aflame, and the poor, demented creature roared out —

“ Come if you dare, d— you ! You've got a man before you.”

And he clenched his fist, and ground his teeth, and planted his back to the wall, and awaited the onslaught !

Over the darkness, and through the silence, a soft, sad voice murmured —

“ Caroline, my darling, come back to me—come back ! ”

Then Dick cried, “ Bogy be beggared ; it's the cap'n himself ! Cheer up, sir, cheer up ! It's only Dick Griffiths. Keep up your pecker, keep up your pecker, cap'n ! ” and he

groped his way through the darkness to where Herbert lay, in the opposite corner. Dick tried to make him speak, but the only answer he could elicit was the plaintive refrain of—

"Caroline, come back to me, my darling—come back!"

"It's his sweetheart he's goin' on about," said Dick. "Poor chap, poor chap! it's no use a-talkin' to him now."

He was right, for presently Herbert ceased to speak, or even to breathe!

Then a greater fear fell upon Griffiths.

"My God!" he cried, "he's dead! And I shall die, too, if they don't come and let me out of this cursed place."

Another terror was now added to those which had already unnerved the poor engine-driver.

He would have met death face to face by daylight without flinching, but he was afraid of being alone in the darkness, with death!

At the very thought he sprang to his feet. He battered against the walls ; he tore at them with his hands, till they were bruised and bleeding ; he cried, he laughed, he shouted, he shrieked, he blasphemed. At last, in the agony of his despair, he cast himself headlong on the floor of the cell ; and with the impinge he, too, lay there senseless.

How long he remained thus he never knew ; but when consciousness returned, the haunting horror came back tenfold—he was alone, alone with darkness and death.

At this very moment, when his brain was racked, almost to bursting, he heard a loud, regular, stertorous breathing. With a wild cry, the poor fellow shrieked out, “He’s alive ! thank God ! Cap’n, dear heart, cheer up ; I’m a-comin’.”

Directed by the sound, he once more made his way to the spot where Herbert lay. Then he put his arms round poor Jack’s neck and rested, and rocked his head upon his breast,

nursing him the while like a woman, and crying like a child.

Those tears saved Dick Griffiths from madness.

Now these centuries of agony occupied barely eight hours—but such an eight hours !

At the dinner hour (half-past two) the door was thrown open, and the voice of the turnkey was heard calling out sharply —

“ Now then, Nos. 75 and 92, clear out ! ”

Receiving no reply, he cast the light of his bull's-eye over the place, till it reached the corner where Herbert was lying all unconscious in the other's arms. When the men entered, Griffiths whispered, “ Hush ! hush ! or you'll wake him.”

Ah ! there was little fear of that.

Even those hearts of stone were touched. They lifted Herbert gently and carried him forth.

Griffiths, though dazed and half blinded

with the sudden light, disdained all help for himself, and followed like a lamb.

When they laid poor Jack on his pallet more dead than alive, they tried to persuade Dick to leave him, alleging there was no danger, and that they would send for the doctor.

“Send for him while I’m here then, mates,” said Griffiths.

“We have sent for him,” replied one of the men, “but he’s out, and won’t be back for an hour or two.”

“Very well, then ; I ain’t in a hurry, and I can wait till he comes.”

“But it’s contrairy to discipline.”

“Oh ! discipline be d—d,” replied Dick ; “here I am, and here I stick ! ”

Alarmed at Herbert’s condition, and finding it useless to remonstrate with Griffiths, they left him mounting guard over his friend’s body, like the faithful hound in the story.

And here I pause to ask how is it that the law of the land, still provides bankrupt merchants, promoters of bubble companies, and gigantic swindlers of every description with absolute immunity from arrest—nay, more, by some occult process, permits them to retain splendid mansions, plate, pictures, carriages, horses, and the like, which should belong to their creditors, while honest, struggling men, who have the misfortune to incur some paltry, miserable, debt, are imprisoned like thieves, disciplined like felons, starved, insulted, tortured, and condemned to manual labour of so degrading and so loathsome a character, that the details can scarcely be hinted at, far less described, in these pages?

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF HADES.

“ Free again, free ! ”

AS Clerehead and I, were making the best of our way to the Castle, we encountered the little manager from Claremount, and the equally little Dr. MacFarlane. I introduced them to Clerehead, and they offered to accompany us.

It soon transpired that our friend the doctor, cherished an utter detestation for the Governor, to which he gave utterance at every eligible opportunity.

When we got to the jail and requested to

see Herbert, "Redhead" replied, as usual —

"No prisoner can be seen without an order from the visiting justices."

Clerehead retorted —

"Visiting justices be blanked! We don't want those idiots' permission to pay a debt. My friend is arrested for debt, contempt of court, whatever else you gentlemen choose to call it, and I'm here to pay the money. Mind, I tender it now. I call these gentlemen to witness it's a legal tender. Bank of England notes. D'ye see? D'ye see?" and he flourished a handful of Bank of England notes under the fellow's nose. "Now refuse at your peril, and I'll bring an action for false imprisonment. Here's my card; take it to the Governor."

After a pause of irresolution "Redhead" snatched the card, and slammed the wicket in our faces.

In a short time he returned, and without a word conducted us to the Governor's room.

The Major made no attempt at even the appearance of politeness. He opened fire with his everlasting —

“What—what—what—what do you want, good people? Be quick, for my official duties leave me no time for ceremony.”

“No, nor civility either,” responded Clerehead, with a delicate drawl.

“What—what—what do you mean?”

“What I say. I suppose you’re the Governor of this place?”

“*Suppose* I am the Governor? I *am* the Governor, sir!”

“Very well; my friend John Herbert is in your custody, on suspicion of debt. I’m here to pay whatever he owes, and take him away.”

“Tut—tut—tut. It’s after hours. Money must be paid to proper official in the office, and in office hours, ’twixt ten and four. It’s now a quarter past four, and my dinner’s waiting.”

“It will have to wait, then!”

“What—what—what ! Do you know who you are speaking to ? ”

“ I’m speaking to you, a public servant ; to *my* servant, for the matter of that.”

The Governor gasped and became purple with rage. Then he touched a nob in the wall, and turning round he confronted the doctor.

“ Doctor Anderson,” he growled, “ I expect this is some of your dirty work, bringing this person here to insult me ; but I’ll be even with you, as sure as my name is Samuel Welks.”

The little doctor took stock of his enemy from head to foot, and said —

“ You even with me—you ! Why, you—you cross between an Albino and an alligator, if you were skinned, and dried, and stuffed, I wouldn’t promote you to the dignity of a doormat out-side my dispensary ! ”

Despite our anxiety, Clerehead and I couldn’t help laughing at the little man’s

superb disdain and the Governor's impotent rage.

At this moment the door was thrown open, and the black-bearded fellow with the snub nose (no longer snub, but bulbous) entered. Decidedly this gentleman's appearance was by no means improved by the application of Griffiths' water bucket.

"Jinks," said Whelks, "show these people the door, and if you've any difficulty call the men and put them out ; you understand."

Jinks was either not a man of many words, or he was out of sorts from the *fracas* of the morning, so he merely made a curt military salute to his superior, and, turning to us, pointed to the door as he said —

"Now then, out you go !"

Finding no response, he strode up to Clerehead, and said, in the most insolent manner—

"Do you mean to go out quietly, or am I to chuck you out ?"

"Mr. Jinks," said Clerehead, getting very

pale, "if you've any regard for your health you'll not try an experiment of that kind with me."

"Nor with me," said I; "two can play at that game."

"Three, sir—three!" interjected Thompson, swelling like a turkey cock. Then the little man said, with dignity, "Mind what you're about, my good fellow; I'm a 'chucker-out' myself!"

"As for me," said the doctor, "dare to lay a finger on me, and I'll slip my lancet into you, you son of a sore-headed kangaroo!"

Mr Jinks concluded not to try the experiment with any of us, but retired in graceful confusion.

Then Clerehead, addressing the Governor, said —

"Look here, Mr. What's-your-name, since it is evident courtesy is thrown away upon you, I'll speak to you in a language you understand. Would it surprise you to learn

that I have the honour of being personall acquainted with the Home Secretary? If John Herbert isn't out of this infernal hole within the next half-hour I'll make it too hot to hold you, and your friend, Mr. Jinks, here into the bargain. I shall wait your answer for just ten minutes, and if I don't hear from you by that time, I shall do myself the pleasure of telegraphing to the Home Office."

So saying, he walked out of the room, and we followed.

In considerably less than five minutes Mr. Jinks came to us and said —

"This way, gents; you mustn't mind him. He generally gets cranky about dinner-time, 'specially if the fodder's kept waitin'."

"He's aye so," growled the doctor; "in fact, it's the normal condition of the brute!"

Jinks conducted us to the office where Herbert had undergone examination upon his arrival.

Clerehead paid the money due, and the man in charge handed over the watch and chain, cigar-case, Clerehead's cheque, &c., and the latter signed a receipt for them.

Another bell, another turnkey, who is ordered to release "No. 75." We are desired to wait a few minutes while he is getting ready.

We go out into the corridor, Clerehead passes his cigar-case round, and in a minute's time we are all four puffing away like steam engines.

Our audacity overawes the official mind, for when Jinks returns, he merely salutes and says —

"This way, gents; unfortunately, there's been a little muss this morning, a sort of free fight amongst the prisoners in the debtors' ward, and 'No. 75' has got an ugly knock or two on the head."

We are shown into the waiting-room, where

we find Herbert propped up, and supported by two warders, who were not present during the *mêlée*.

Poor Jack's coat is torn to pieces, his face and head bearing marks of severe ill-usage ; his eyes are fixed ; he is alive, that is all, but quite unconscious, and unable to speak, walk, or even stand.

The doctor examines him carefully, shakes his head. The men are nervous and embarrassed. We demand an explanation, but can only elicit that "No. 75 has been in a little muss, that's all."

Mr. Jinks, who evidently has remembered Clerehead's advice, has made himself scarce. I am furious as a wild beast, Clerehead is little better. We demand to see the Governor ; he, too, has regard for his health, and is not to be seen again.

While we are fuming, and fretting, the doctor and the manager, are lifting poor Jack into the cab.

The doctor says —

“ While you’re wasting your breath on yon beast of an Albino, this poor lad is dying ; for God’s sake let’s get him to the Infirmary at once. It’s a case of life or death.”

And so, without another word, we proceed to the Infirmary, where Herbert is put to bed immediately.

The house physician is a young Irishman, named O’Brien. He has walked Guy’s Hospital, is a great playgoer, knows Herbert and Clara well, knows Clerehead better ; in fact, knows everybody connected with the profession.

He joins the little Scotchman ; they inspect Herbert together. They hold a hurried, whispered consultation ; we await the result with breathless anxiety.

Anderson comes out radiant, exclaiming —

“ Only concussion of the brain ! ”

“ Only concussion of the brain ? ” we echo, in alarm.

"Aye, and you may thank God it's na worse ; I didn't like to alarm ye. I thought it was a case of compound fracture, but we can guarantee that in a few days 'Richard will be himself again.' Eh, O'Brien?"

"I think we can," responds his colleague.

"Thank God!" I exclaim.

"That's all right," says Clerehead. "Now, I've invariably noticed that after a funeral or a fight, the first thing Englishmen do, is to dine. Dining is an excellent institution ; it's the palladium of England's greatness. I've had nothing to eat all day. We'll leave you to put our poor friend straight, while we go and order the grub. I shall take no refusal. At seven, gentlemen, we shall expect you."

So at seven they came to the White Hart, and, strange as it may appear, environed as we were with trouble and anxiety, we contrived to eat and drink, and Thompson, the doctors, and Clerehead were actually quite jolly over the walnuts and the wine.

After dinner the latter said —

“ Since I am sure you desire to serve our unfortunate friends, I wish you would give us a certificate of their condition for publication in the London papers, and,” with a sly wink, “ just drop them as gently as you can. *Comprenez-vous ?* ”

“ I think I do,” responded O’Brien, with another wink.

“ Oh, aye, a nod is as guid as a wink to a blind horse,” chimed in the little Scotchman, and they wrote the certificates there and then.

Anderson left us to see how Clara was getting on ; presently he returned, and reported, that in eight or ten days hence, she might be removed home.

Then I proposed we should accompany O’Brien to the Infirmary, to see how Jack was progressing.

Poor fellow ! he was still quite unconscious, and kept continually murmuring, “ Caroline, come back to me, my darling—come back ! ”

The business of the theatre demanded the immediate presence of Clerehead and myself, and we therefore arranged to return to town, by the first train in the morning.

I felt it very hard to go away and leave the dearest friends I had in the world in their present condition. Both O'Brien and MacFarlane, however, assured me that they would see their patients every hour in the day, and keep me posted in their progress—above all, if either of them got worse, they would wire me, so that, if necessary, I might be with them.

My heart was too full for words, and I scarce knew how to thank these good fellows, so I merely shook hands with them. Clerehead, however, was of a more practical turn of mind, so he gave each of them a card.

“Take this,” said he, “and whenever you come to town if you don't call on me I shall take it as an affront. That card will admit you to the best box in the Frivolity any night

in the year except on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, when that ass the Lord Chamberlain compels us to put up our shutters ; but even then, I think I may promise you a mutton chop, and a glass of claret, eh, Bob ? ”

“ Certainly,” I answered ; and so we bade them good-night, congratulating ourselves upon leaving our poor friends in such safe hands.

As we walked back to the hotel together Thompson, the manager, with some diffidence, opened fire about the breakdown at Claremount. Of course, his position was a serious one, and we both felt for him. Fortunately “ Grinangag,” the great comedian of the Frivolity, was not in “ Orpheus,” and Topsy Toodlems (the “ Bright particular Star ” of the Music Halls, who had originally been engaged for the title rôle) was on our salary list: besides which, we had half-a-dozen other people walking about doing

nothing. These, with a dozen ballet, would make up a fairly efficient company to do "The Bragobras of Bagdad" and a couple of comediettas, so Clerehead generously proposed to send them for a fortnight, giving Thompson their gratuitous services in compensation for Herbert's and Clara's breaking down. Thus the matter was settled to the poor manager's satisfaction, and he returned to Claremount with a lighter heart than when he left it.

I may here mention that the "Bragobras" recouped him for the loss he had sustained, besides which, he brought an action for libel against "The Scorcher," and gained swingeing damages, so that on the whole he did not do so badly by this unfortunate business.

The last thing before going to bed, I went to bid Mrs. Le Blanc "good-bye," and to ask how Clara was getting on.

"Beautifully," she said. "Since you are

going away, if you are a good boy, you may have just one little peep."

There lay my darling, pale as marble, and, to all appearance, almost as motionless. Her hands, whiter than her sheets, lay folded on her bosom. She looked like one of those white angels, I have seen reclining on a tomb of Chantrey's, somewhere in the Abbey.

As I gazed, an awe fell upon me.

"M-may I?" I falteringly enquired.

"I'm not looking," said Mrs. Le Blanc.

I lifted the dear little hand to my lips and kissed it reverently. Then, turning to Mrs. Le Blanc, I took both her hands and kissed them also.

"You are our only friend," I said; "to your care I confide her. You will let me know, day by day, how she progresses, and if things should take a bad turn, you will not keep it from me—promise me that."

"I promise," she said, and so we parted.

As I left the room I encountered Clere-

head in the lobby. He gave me a glum look, and said —

“Soho! my friend, you may steal the horse, but I am not to look over the hedge. I came two hundred miles merely to ascertain whether she was dead or alive, and that old catamaran won’t let me come within a mile of her. I’m not pious enough, I suppose. Never mind! the stake is not lost, till it’s won, and we shall see—what we shall see.”

“We shall,” I replied.

Then we lighted our candles, and sought our rooms in silence.

CHAPTER IX.

LAUDATE !

AT eight in the morning we were on our way to town together.

Clerehead was in his most cynical and least agreeable mood, or perhaps I was. Instead of his perpetual cigarettes he smoked huge Havannahs all the way—a sure sign that he was out of sorts. I smoked my pipe in silence.

He bought all the magazines and papers, daily and weekly, he could lay his hands on, skimmed them through with great rapidity, then littered the seats with them in every direction.

“Look here, Bob,” he burst out at last, “I know what you are thinking about as well as if I were inside your skin. ‘Now lay thy finger thus, and let thy discreet soul be instructed.’ They’ll both get better, that’s safe as houses; but I was down in Harrögate with them for a fortnight, and Jack Herbert will no more marry Clara Trevor than I shall marry Julia Pastrana. He and Caroline Challoner are made for each other. If she doesn’t have him she’ll ‘live and die a spinster, and pay the tax,’ and if he doesn’t have her he’ll die a bachelor. So cheer up, there’s a chance for you or me.”

“For you?” I exclaimed. “But I loved her the first moment I saw her.”

“So did I,” he replied; “only you had the first chance, and didn’t make the most of it. Now, it’s no use getting waxy, or playing dog in the manger. Confound it all! If she won’t have you, who knows, but I may stand a chance? Anyhow, when she gets better I

shall try my luck—so shake hands upon it, and may the best man win.”

“It is early times to talk about that,” said I, “but let it be as you wish.”

At length we got to town. As we drove from the station he said —

“What the deuce are we to do about La Challoner?”

“How can I tell until I’ve seen her?”

“That’s true,” said he; “so we’d better drive to Morley’s at once.”

When we were ushered into her room, Caroline sprang up and approached us eagerly.

The anxiety of the past two or three days had told upon her. There were two deep blue hollows beneath her eyes, which appeared preternaturally large; her long hair streamed down her shoulders and over the loose purple robe which flowed from head to

heel, without cincture, girdle, or restraint of any kind.

“Well—well—well! Speak, or I shall go mad!” she exclaimed.

“Be composed,” said Clerehead; “the whole thing is a shameful *canard*. The simple fact is, he was arrested for debt.”

“He is in prison, then?”

“He was; but do you think it likely we should be here, if he were still there?”

“You are very good, sir,” she replied.

“Mr. Penarvon,” she continued, “you were his friend. Tell me all; I can bear it.”

“He is slightly indisposed—caught cold upon the journey, and we have left him under the charge of Doctor O’Brien.”

“An intimate personal friend of mine,” interjected Clerehead, eagerly. “See, here is the medical certificate.”

When she had read it, I think she would have fallen to the ground, had we not caught her in our arms, and supported her to a chair.

She sat cowering over the fire in silence for a few moments ; then springing to her feet, and ringing the bell, enquired —

“ May I offer you some tea ? ”

When we had taken tea, she rose, and said —

“ You must excuse me, but it is time to go to the theatre, and I — ”

She tottered towards the door, but Clerehead took her firmly, yet gently, by the wrist, and leading her back to her seat, said —

“ Miss Challoner, you’re not going to the Theatre to-night ; and you shan’t go at all if you don’t do what I tell you !

“ To-morrow morning, at twelve, I shall come for you with my daughter Milly. You wouldn’t think it, but I’ve a daughter, nearly as old as you are ; she lives with my sister, who has a little cottage down at Norwood ; and she’s a highly respectable old woman, though, perhaps, you wouldn’t think that, either. I shall drive you

down in my trap, and Milly and Penarvon shall talk to you all the way. When you are settled you will go with Milly to the Crystal Palace daily—she knows every inch of it. Penarvon shall come and see you every other day, and when he doesn't come, I will ; and what's more, I'll teach you to play whist! If that doesn't cure you and make you say once more —

“ ‘ My soul's in arms, and eager for the play,’ why, then James Clerehead knows nothing of human nature! Not another word—now mind, twelve to-morrow,” and having conjured up the shadow of a smile on her face, he turned to quit the room ; then he stopped abruptly, and said —

“ Bob, never mind the theatre—the poor child is lonely ; you'd better stay awhile and talk with her about old times.”

The situation was awkward for us both—we were continually treading upon delicate ground.

She was under the impression that she had been wronged, but her great love leaped forth like fire whenever I mentioned Jack's name ; yet there was great difficulty in avoiding all mention of the " other one " — besides, her woman's instinct had long since told her that I adored her rival.

We had, however, many subjects of common interest ; and time passed so quickly that when ten o'clock came we were both surprised. She pressed me to take supper, and promised, if I would do so, that she would join me, and she actually drank a glass of claret, and ate the first mouthful of solid food she had tasted for days.

At length the clock struck eleven, and I rose to take my departure. Then she croodled up to me, and said —

" Mr. Penarvon, do you think he'll soon get better ? "

" Yes, I do." I replied.

" But are you sure ? "

“ Quite sure.”

“ Thank you ; you were his friend—his only one. He always called you Robert ; may I call you so ? ”

“ I shall feel flattered and honoured, Miss Challoner.”

“ Call me Carry,” she said ; “ he always did.”

“ Well, Carry,” I said.

“ That’s right ; I’m so lonely. I haven’t a friend in the world except him and—you.”

“ You forget Mr. Clerehead,” I said.

“ Yes, oh ! yes, Mr. Clerehead. He’s very good and kind ; but he’s a holiday friend, while he and you were comrades, you know ; but you—you love—*her* ? ”

“ Dearer than life.”

Then after a pause she enquired in tremulous tones —

“ Do you think *he* does ? ”

“ He esteems and honours her, but he loves you, and you only.”

The hot blood mounted over her brow. She was radiant with happiness.

“God bless you,” she said, “you have made me so happy. I shall get better soon; I am better already. Good-night.”

As I passed down the corridor I heard her singing the “Laudate” of Zingarelli.

I paused and listened to the glorious melody. It seemed as if a hundred linnets imprisoned in her throat, were leaping forth to get free, and greet the sunrise, as the jubilant words —

“Laudate pueri nomen Domine”

arose to Heaven.

CHAPTER X.

DOCTOR CLEREHEAD.

“Pluck from the memory, a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain.”

CLEREHEAD had diagnosed Caroline's malady accurately, and his treatment was entirely successful.

The little cottage at Norwood turned out to be an elegant villa residence, situate in its own grounds, his sister a very charming and accomplished widow of forty, and his daughter was (and is, bless her heart !) an angel.

Caroline was yearning for sympathy, and though she kept the great grief of her life

to herself, it was something inexpressibly pleasant to have the companionship of this young, fresh, and ingenuous mind.

Both girls had the same tastes. They loved poetry and music, flowers and pictures, and they did not disdain needlework; they read the same books, they sang, they played, they even danced together.

It was difficult to realize that so innocent a child as Milly could be the daughter of this *blasé* man of the world.

When I first saw her I couldn't help expressing my astonishment at their relationship, whereupon Clerehead flared up and said —

“Is there anything astounding in my having a daughter?”

“No,” I replied, “there is certainly nothing astonishing in your having a daughter, or half-a-dozen daughters; but such a daughter as this! ‘Who from such a stem would look for such a shoot?’”

“You are complimentary,” he growled ;
“but ah, you didn’t know her mother,” and
he left the room abruptly.

Presently, however, I saw him smoking his
cigarette on the terrace outside.

In half an hour’s time he returned, and
began to try to initiate his patient into the
mysteries of his pet abomination, “whist.”

During this short holiday, we had a musical
evening entirely to ourselves. Caroline had
asked me to bring down her violin, so we
made a fair quartette. She led with the
fiddle, Milly played the piano, I followed
with the flute, and Clerehead—yes, even
Clerehead, had his soft place—he played
on the violincello, and played it well, too.

I think we all forgot our troubles that
pleasant Saturday evening.

Next day we took a walk with the girls
after church time, and Clerehead said —

"Now, Miss Challoner, you're something like yourself, and you must be in harness by Tuesday, so you had better get back to town to-morrow morning."

"Papa," said Milly, "may I go up and see Carry act?"

"My darling," he replied, gravely, "you may go up, and you may come down, but you can't see Miss Challoner act at present. Wait till she plays Juliet, and then you shall have a box, all to yourself."

"Seriously, my pet, you may come and stay with Miss Challoner any day in the week from twelve to four, that, is, if she'll have you. Yes, any day except Tuesday next, when I'm sure she doesn't want to be bothered, and Saturday and Sunday, when she has whispered to me that she wants to come here, that is to say, she wants to come down every Saturday night and stay till Monday morning. That's about it, isn't it, Miss Challoner?"

Caroline assented with a smile.

We returned to town on Monday, in time for a twelve o'clock rehearsal, so as to make sure that all was smooth for the following night.

Caroline had few acquaintances, and certainly no friends, among the female members of the company, and the "beggarly account of empty benches" which ensued on her withdrawal from the theatre, didn't enhance their regard for the "provincial actress."

She, however, returned their aversion with placid indifference, and passed them by as if unaware of their very existence, but when she stepped on the stage, the entire orchestra rose, and applauded her like one man. Then she collapsed into tears. A little kindness easily touched that proud heart.

Clerehead was the best "showman" in the world (except *one*, whom I prefer not to par-

ticularize!), and he had availed himself of every trick of that not very dignified calling to direct attention to Caroline's reappearance. The result was a densely crowded house, a most enthusiastic audience, and all the outward and visible signs of success.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRD HAS FLOWN.

“Lost evermore to me!”

EVERY day's post brought us more satisfactory reports from MacFarlane and O'Brien as to the condition of their patients, so leaving Caroline to her triumphs, Clerehead and I (for he persisted in accompanying me) went down to Bolingbroke, in obedience to the behest of Mrs. Le Blanc, to bring Clara home.

Three weeks had elapsed since our last visit, and we were surprised and delighted to

find her better even than we had dared to anticipate.

She was dressed in a white peignoir trimmed with a delicate green, her beautiful hair flowing down one mass of curls, her face very pale, her eyes preternaturally bright. Heaps of flowers were around her, and about her, and she was half sitting, half reclining in an invalid's chair. In her hand was an open volume of "*In Memoriam.*" I had time to notice these four lines, marked at the side with a pencil —

"I own this true, whate'er befall,
I feel it when I sorrow most,
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all!"

She must have seen that I saw the passage, for she coloured vividly, and rapidly closed the book, as she murmured half remorsefully, yet in scarcely audible tones —

"How good you are to forgive me!"

With that she timidly extended her hand, but I made no sign to take it.

Here was I dying to pour forth my heart at her feet, and yet I stood as one stricken dumb.

After a moment's pause of mutual embarrassment, she turned from me to Clerehead, and extending both her hands to him, exclaimed —

“ Ah, Mr. Clerehead, I'm so glad to see you.”

He stooped down and kissed them with effusive ardour.

I felt as if I could have killed him on the spot !

“ How kind of you to send this wonderful chair, and the fruit and flowers, above all, the books ; I adore poetry. But really you do everything *en monseigneur*. I'm sure I don't know what we should have done without you.”

He murmured something in reply which I did not hear ; then he said aloud, banteringly —

“ Well, Sir Knight of the rueful countenance, don’t you think we’d better see about dinner ? ”

“ As you please,” I replied, moodily, taking up the “ Times,” and throwing myself in a chair facing the window, but with my back placed towards them.

“ Well, then, it pleases me to go and look up that hamper I brought from Fortnam and Mason’s, and to consult the cook about the grouse.” And so he left us.

Although I sat with my back to Clara, the window before me was of plate-glass, and reflected some strange optical illusions, or delusions.

I was not reading the paper any more than I am reading it now. Before me, in the window, I saw reflected the fire, and the couch on which reclined a fair woman in white. I saw the table with the fruit and the flowers. I noted with eager interest, that, the moment he quitted the room,

she sprang up, looked round to see if she was observed, then rapidly walked over to another table, on which lay a large Greek urn or basin, filled with water-lilies, floating in their native element. She dipped her dainty embroidered kerchief in the water, and commenced scrubbing the backs of her beautiful hands, just where he, a moment before, had left the imprint of his lips. She was as earnest in the operation as she used to be in Lady Macbeth, when she was endeavouring to obliterate "the damnèd spot."

When she returned to the couch I arose, and went over to her, intending to speak. She looked at me enquiringly, I thought superciliously; and—confound the fellow—at this moment Clerehead returned, accompanied by Mrs. Le Blanc. He was radiant with good-humour, and made himself infernally agreeable. I consoled myself a little by thinking that perhaps he wouldn't have been quite so radiant, if he had perceived

the little pantomimic performance, which had taken place a minute ago.

We had taken the precaution to strictly impress on our kind friends the doctors, not to let either Mrs. Le Blanc or Clara, know anything about Herbert's latest misfortunes. Therefore, as soon as I could get the chance of speaking to Mrs. Le Blanc alone, I begged her to tell me, exactly, what she had told Clara about Herbert. She informed me briefly, that she had told her all she knew—which was, in point of fact, that he had been released from prison.

A fortnight ago Clara had enquired, abruptly —

“Is he still in Bolingbroke?”

“I believe so,” the other replied.

“And he has never been to see me—to enquire for me?”

“Never!”

For two or three days after that Clara sat

brooding, silent, and melancholy ; then came the invalid chair, the fruit and flowers from London, and the books. She buried herself in "In Memoriam." Presently she began to thaw, and then—"But you can see for yourself, Robert."

We hoped to find Herbert fit for removal to Norwood, as an agreeable surprise for Caroline, on the following Sunday ; so while dinner was preparing, we strolled down to the Infirmary.

We met O'Brien at the very gate.

"What have you done with Herbert?" he enquired.

"What have *we* done with Herbert? What do you mean?" we both exclaimed.

"Mean?" replied O'Brien, "why I told him this morning, you were both coming down by the express, and he went to the station to meet you."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "is this coil

never to end? We've not even seen him. Come with us down to the station at once, and let us enquire what has become of him."

To our horror, we ascertained that he had actually left Bolingbroke by the very train by which we arrived !

He had booked to Glasgow—that much was certain, for the booking clerk not only knew him, but as he had no money, he had been obliged to leave his gold watch-guard (which was of considerable value) in pawn ; and the young man had not only advanced his fare, but had lent him a pound besides, on the same security.

How was this mystery to be explained ?

My course was clear ; I did not hesitate a moment. My duty was to follow him. We had an early dinner, then Clerehead, Mrs. Le Blanc, and Clara went to town, by the express that left at five. When the guard had locked the door, and she saw me remaining alone on

the platform, Clara enquired, I thought somewhat wistfully —

“Do you not accompany us then?”

“No,” I replied, curtly.

She seemed vexed ; anyhow, she looked at me reproachfully, and her eyes were fixed on mine to the last, while the train moved slowly away, leaving me standing there alone.

The mail for Scotland did not leave till eleven. Oh ! the weary, weary waiting of those six mortal hours ! Every fugitive wind of Heaven blew in every direction, through every hole and corner of that miserable station. The place represented the very abomination of desolation. I walked up and down the platform, until I had learnt by heart every poster and advertisement. I went into the waiting-room—no fire, of course ! there never is one, in these places. I found the good old book lying on a table, alighted by accident on the story of Esau and Jacob,

read it, cast it down with anger, exclaiming, "What a dastardly skunk that Jacob must have been!" dashed out impatiently into the rain, and walked on till I found myself, by merest accident, before the Infirmary. Then it struck me that I'd look up the doctor, and see if I could obtain any further information about Jack.

O'Brien was heartily glad to see me. "Sure it's a comfort," said he, "to see a Christian in this God-forgotten hole. Come along, and I'll give you a tumbler of poteen that'll warm the cockles of your heart."

Over a pipe and a glass of punch, he informed me that Dick Griffiths, having served his time for contempt of Court, had called only the day previous, to enquire how Herbert was getting on.

The scene between Jack and his humble friend was very touching. When it was over, as Dick was about to leave the Infirmary, O'Brien called him in, set his tongue going

with a glass of whiskey and water, and elicited from him a full, true, and particular account of the fight in the prison, and other matters with which the reader is already acquainted.

When Dick had done his thirty days, he turned round to Jinks, and said —

“I’m goin’ to see how the cap’n’s gettin’ on. If he’s gone to Kingdom Come—and he was on the way there—you can tell old Whelks, with my compliments, when he and the rest of you murderin’ thieves are brought up for manslaughter, I shall be there to give my evidence. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Jinks.”

With this parting shot, he came to see Herbert. After his interview with O’Brien he went home, and incontinently gave his wife a hiding, like a bold British husband. To be sure, that cost nothing but a stirrup strap, in which he had invested for the purpose; and, to his simple mind,

it seemed a proper law of compensation as far as it went. But it didn't go quite as far as he wanted it to go ; so, as it happened to be the day usually set apart for the tallyman's weekly visit, he waited for him, and let him have the stirrup strap, hot.

Ultimately, Dick had to pay forty shillings for the luxury ; but he was quite content, for, as he said, " he had had his money's worth."

As for Mrs. Griffiths, she concluded not to truck with that tallyman any more, and he very sagaciously concluded to steer clear of Dick's diggings during his next journey ; and here honest Dick disappears altogether from this narrative.

The doctor told me, the wonder was that poor Jack was not killed. He had patched him up as well as he could, but he certainly would never be the same man again. O'Brien suspected at first, but now he was sure, Herbert had a " kink" in his brain ; and that was

why he had made this precipitate retreat to avoid his old friends.

It was now getting near the time of my departure, so O'Brien offered to see me off. On our way to the railway I called in at the police-station to thank Macdonald, and his bonnie little wife, for all their care and kindness to Clara. The honest fellow gave me my darling's purse, containing her three, hundred-pound notes, and some five or six sovereigns, but declined any compensation for his men ; it was enough for him, he said, that he had once seen Clara play Rosalind, but he would be very glad if I could do anything to help Cassidy, the Irish sailor, as the poor fellow was in sore distress. I bequeathed the honest Irishman the loose sovereigns, and bore in mind Macdonald's recommendation. (*En parenthèse*, Mick Cassidy is now the bright, active messenger, you may see any day in the week at the Frivolity, and his wife is engaged in the wardrobe.)

Just before the train started, O'Brien enquired —

“Is this card which Mr. Clerehead gave me for only one, or for any night?”

“For every night,” I replied, “while I am in the theatre.”

“I’m glad of that,” he said, “for I’m going to ‘turn up’ this penal servitude, and get back to the ‘little village’ as soon as I can, so I anticipate many pleasant evenings.”

The train began to move, but he moved with it to the end of the platform, as he said —

“Good-bye—good luck to you, Mr. Penarvon. The ‘pleasantest evening’ I’ll have in this pig-sty-of-a-place will be the night before I go away, when I’ll call at ‘The Hare and Hounds’ and give that infernal Albino the finest bating he ever had in his life, or my name’s not Patrick O’Brien.”*

* I am delighted to say that my friend Pat was enabled to keep his word before he left Bolingbroke.

Next morning I was in Glasgow. I went straight to Herbert's old theatre; but no one had seen or heard anything of him there. I went to theatre after theatre; enquired in every direction, but no one knew anything of my unhappy friend. 'Twas evident I had made a bootless journey.

Previous to returning to town, I left instructions with everyone I knew, to communicate with me the moment he was seen or heard of.

When I got back, Clerehead told me that Clara had reached home safely, and, though tired, was not much the worse for her fatigue.

"Now," said he, "the next thing to do, is to break the news about Herbert, to La Challoner. The sooner she knows the better, for nothing is so bad as suspense. I don't shirk the job; but you've known her longer than I have—she will bear it better from you. Go down with her to-night to Norwood; to-

morrow, being Sunday, she'll have all the day to get over it."

God knows my own troubles were hard enough to bear ; but of course I went down to Norwood, and, after supper, I got Mrs. Elton and Milly to leave me alone with Caroline. Then I told her as well as I could the bitter truth.

That she suffered much was plain, but she bore it bravely.

After a pause, she asked —

" Did he go away—alone ? "

" Quite alone," I said.

" You're sure of that ? "

" Quite sure."

" Please don't tell these women here. I don't mind your knowing, Robert, because we both love him ; but I don't want strangers to participate in a confidence, so sacred. You know, of course, that Mr. Clerehead gives me a large salary, more, I think, than I deserve. I want something put in ' The Times '—see, something like this —"

She sat down and rapidly wrote the following advertisement :—

“ If John Herbert, Esq., late manager of the Great Northern Circuit, will communicate with his friends, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage.

“ As it is possible Mr. Herbert may have been taken ill, during his recent journey to Scotland, £100 reward will be paid to anyone forwarding his authentic address to

“ ROBERT PENARVON,

“ Frivolity Theatre, London.”

“ I haven’t asked if I may use your name,” she said.

“ You knew, of course, that it was needless to do so.”

“ You will have that inserted every day until we find him ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Thank you. You have always been his friend, henceforth you are my brother ! ”

BOOK THE SIXTH.

CHAPTER I.

DRIFTING AWAY.

“Of all afflictions taught a lover yet,
'Tis sure the hardest to forget.”

WEEKS and months have passed away.

Clara has gradually recovered her health, but her mind seems sorely unhinged by the recent events, or perhaps I only think so. One thing, however, is quite certain—she is strangely changed in her demeanour to me. There is an inexplicable shadow cast between us, which estranges us daily more and more.

It is no longer "Bob" or "Robert;" it is always "Mr. Penarvon" now. Instead of coming forward to meet me with the old, cordial welcome, she is reserved and distant—perhaps I am a little so myself. I begin to think that this frequently arises from Clerehead's presence, for I am no longer the only invited guest. He is always at Florence Villa on Sunday; always alert, and agreeable even to Mrs. Le Blanc. Formerly I was welcome at all times—at all times spoiled, and petted, by both ladies.

Though only a few years older than myself, had Mrs. Le Blanc been my mother and I her only son, she could not have been more thoughtful and affectionate.

It is Clara only who is changed.

Formerly, when we went to the theatre, I used to bring a couple of modest bouquets from Covent Garden at a shilling each, and she would prepare a nosegay for my button-hole, and place it there.

Alas! how changed it all is.

Now, if there is a picture to be seen, a concert to be given, a *première* to take place, Clerehead has facilities, which I do not possess, for securing the best seats, the best boxes. For her sake he even accepts Mrs. Le Blanc as her *chaperone*, though he dislikes her, quite as much as she distrusts him.

Punctual to the moment he turns up at Florence Villa, always armed with the choicest bouquets the Floral Hall can provide. When the performance is over, he deposits the ladies at the door of the villa.

Many a time have I waited for her return, in the rain and the snow, till night changed to morning. Amidst my misery, how grateful I felt that they never once asked him in—that would have made my cup of bitterness to overflow.

One evening, at about eight o'clock, I called to bring Mrs. Le Blanc half-a-dozen

excerpts I had made for her at the Museum, for some book she was writing.

Clerehead's brougham was waiting at the open door. Passing by the drawing-room, I heard the two voices I knew so well, mingling in low, pleasant laughter. I saw them standing before the fire—he was in the act of handing her a magnificent bouquet; she was expressing her admiration.

“And now give me one little flower for a *boutonnière*,” he said.

“Choose for yourself,” she replied.

“I could have done that before, but I want to know, to feel sure, that your fingers have touched the flowers.”

She looked him straight in the eyes; he encountered her gaze without flinching. Pausing for a moment, she lifted the bouquet between her finger and thumb, as if it had been a toad, or some other loathsome thing, and made a movement, as if about to throw

it in the fire ; then, shrugging her beautiful shoulders, she said, with a laugh —

“ Of course the king is welcome to his own again.”

With that, she plucked forth a flower, and placed it in his button-hole.

“ There, Monseigneur ! ” she said. “ I really don’t think you could have been better served in the Floral Hall itself.”

For answer he stooped and kissed her gloved hand, and wrapped her opera cloak around her ; then they moved to the other end of the room.

At this moment, Mrs. Le Blanc, coming rapidly downstairs, dressed for the theatre, encountered me face to face in the hall.

“ Robert ! ” whispered she, in alarm. “ What’s the matter ? Are you ill ? ”

Placing my finger on my lip in sign of silence, without one word, I glided stealthily

and swiftly from the house, glad to escape further torture.

Truly "the jealous are the damned."

How I watched and waited for their return. It was an awful night. But what were storm and tempest to me? Like the poor dis-crownèd king —

"The tempest in my mind
Did from my senses take all feeling else
Save what beat there."

At length, at nearly one in the morning, I heard the clattering of horses' feet, the rumbling of wheels.

His brougham is at the door, he alights, hands out the ladies, lifts his hat ceremoniously, the door is closed, almost in his face; with a fierce gesture of impatience, he shrugs his shoulders, pauses a moment, leaps into the carriage, and is driven rapidly away.

The rain has ceased, the moon is shining brightly; drenched as I am from head to

foot, I wait and wait until I see the light in her chamber.

Usually she looks out into the park the last thing.

Will she do so to-night?

At last! She stands in the moonlight, looking ineffably sad, and yet supremely beautiful; she sighs and closes the curtains.

It is time to be going homeward. I walk towards town, and take the first cab I encounter.

God is good to me, and lets me sleep sometimes—else, months of these bitter experiences must have killed me.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE.

“A man! I’ll swear a man!”

THE “Orpheus fever” has set in.

Business at the Frivolity is enormous; indeed, unprecedented. A seat is not to be had, for love or money, for months to come. Traffic is interrupted nightly, by the crowds who struggle to obtain admittance.

Caroline’s photographs are in every shop window. They are at a premium. You may buy a large cabinet of the P—— or the P——ss for one and eightpence each. Caroline’s cannot be had for less than two

shillings. True, there is a cheaper mode of obtaining the "counterfeit presentment" of the fashionable beauty.

Certain society journals produce exquisitely tinted lithographs, full-length autotypes, and Heaven knows what, at popular prices. The illustrated weeklies and magazines follow suit, and the fever has even spread to the other side of the Atlantic.

Van Vort has published the *Orpheus Waltz* and the *Orpheus Quadrilles*, dedicated by permission to Miss Caroline Challoner, whose portrait appears in glowing colours on the frontispiece.

The *Orpheus* cuffs, the *Orpheus* collars, the *Orpheus* gloves, the *Orpheus* hat, the *Orpheus* necktie; nay, even the *Orpheus* walking-stick have become the rage, and are flaunted before us in the Row, the opera, everywhere.

Fashionable painters and sculptors implore, in vain, for the honour of a sitting. Society

journals teem with on-dits. She is the comet of the season. The stage-door is mobbed nightly by the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade anxious to get a sight of their divinity. The noble army of Mashers declare on to Clerehead begging the honour of an introduction. He replies to them all, with imperturbable good humour —

“No, dear boys, try it somewhere else; she’s not one of that sort. We get on capitally as it is, but she has a temper of her own, and I hate rows.”

One young fellow, with whom I had become somewhat intimately acquainted, the young Duke of Frogmore, used to come to my rooms, continually worrying me to give him an introduction.

It was in vain that I told him she was “engaged;” he returned to the charge morning, noon, and night.

“But look here, don’t you know,” said he,

“ what does it signify about being ‘ engaged ’ if she isn’t spliced ? Besides, dash it all ! only give a fellow a chance ; I can play a waiting game, and who knows but I might carry off the stakes ? Because, look here, don’t you know, a two-year-old ain’t the same form as a filly, and she might take it into her head to change her mind.”

Then he tried another tack. He knew my mania for the poetic drama, and he suggested that I should take a theatre ; he would find the capital and engage Caroline for the leading parts.

“ Look here, don’t you know ! ” said he, “ I can manage a theatre cheaper, than any fella in England.”

“ The deuce you can ! ” I exclaimed. “ How do you mean to set about it ? ”

“ Oh ! easily. Look here, don’t you know ? Last year I made a hole in nearly seventy thousand quid. At Ascot I dropped thirty thou ; at Doncaster twenty : cards over ten : and the

yacht stood me in about ten more. Now, I shall shunt the lot—turf, cards, yacht, and the whole bag of tricks. Suppose the theatre costs me fifty thou a year, you see I'm twenty thou to the good by the transaction. Theatres are a fine game if you know how to manage 'em. Why Pelter dropped more money at the Derby last year in five minutes, than in all the seven years he ran the Elysian, where he had private boxes and stalls galore for his pals for nothing. And then Kilgobbin bought the "Montpelier" and the "Flora," one of them for twelve thou and the other for fourteen, and lets 'em for four thou a year each! That's good business, isn't it? Talk about the 'peoples,' why they ain't in it with my noble friend; he knows his way about, I can tell you. Do, let me take a theatre, old chap, or dash me if I don't build one, and make her fortune and yours and my own into the bargain."

To all his entreaties I turned a deaf ear;

for I liked the boy, and would not lead him into a fool's paradise, but accident befriended him, despite my endeavours, and this was how it came about.

During Caroline's stay at Morley's, the suite of rooms immediately adjacent to hers was occupied by the Princesse Neruda, popularly known as "La Belle Russe." This distinguished personage was a lady of great beauty and accomplishments, banished, it was alleged by her friends, from Holy Russia on account of Nihilistic proclivities; other people, possibly better informed, though less good-natured, asserted that she was in the secret service, and more especially in the confidence and private pay of Prince Gortchakow.

Harry Laburnum, Member for Shoo-borough, and proprietor of the "Crucifier," asserted, with cold-blooded and characteristic candour, "that she was better known than respected in every capital in Europe; that

she had been banished from St. Petersburg ; that she had married young and often ; that her first husband was chief mourner at the funeral of her third or fourth ; that, besides half-a-dozen husbands, she had had as many lovers as the woman in the Arabian Nights ; that she had been mixed up in that little affair of the Grand Duke's with the diamonds ; that she was accustomed to dance the Can-can after her *petit soupers* in the Champs Elysées ; and that, in consequence of throwing her shoe on one of these festive occasions at the head of a certain illustrious personage, she had been 'invited' to leave Paris at a moment's notice."

This, and much more, she read in the "Crucifier," and writhed as she read. Then she resolved to beard the lion in his den ; so she drove down to Elizabeth's Gate, to have it out, with the gentle Laburnum. He received her with his usual cynical urbanity ; she was furious, and talked of proceedings.

He smiled benignantly, and referred her to George Lewis ; then offered her a cigarette of the choicest Latakia, and a cup of Russian tea with a lemon squeezed in it ; asked her opinion about his copy of Titian's Venus and his Messonier ; what she thought of Turgéniev's last book, &c.

She was a sagacious woman, and saw it was better to accept the inevitable ; so they passed a very pleasant hour or two together, "slating" their friends, and comparing their experiences, which were varied and peculiar. They parted mutually impressed. She concluded not to go to Ely Place ; and Harry, who was not a bad sort in his way, dropped her for the future. "She's only a woman, after all," he said.

Now, during Caroline's illness, Madame la Princesse sent her fruit and flowers daily, and as soon as she was convalescent, did herself the honour, of waiting upon the interesting

invalid. This friendly intimacy was sedulously cultivated; and when, a short time after, "La Belle Russe" took a large mansion, splendidly furnished, in the Regent's Park to enable her to carry out her views connected with the game of baccarat, &c., she thought La Belle Challoner would be an agreeable and attractive ornament for the family circle. Hence, when she inaugurated the campaign with a house warming, she invited Caroline and myself, to help her do the honours.

At that time we were both in ignorance of the article in the "Crucifier," and of the lady's antecedents, so, in the innocence of our hearts, we accepted the invitation.

Upon our arrival we were ushered into the drawing-room, where we found upwards of a score of well-known men about town—all more or less distinguished in gaming, sporting, and other less savoury circles—our hostess, and two women who lived very much on the

outskirts of Bohemia—women, in fact, about whom there could be no manner of mistake.

They were all laughing and talking as we entered, and then an awkward silence occurred. The men bowed profoundly as the *Princesse* advanced, all gush and grimace, to meet us. But “*La Belle Russe*” had reckoned without her guest. At the first glance Caroline divined the situation. Her self-possession was admirable. Dexterously avoiding contact, or even recognition, of Madame and her lady friends, she included all the men in the room, in one stately, sweeping curtsey, as she murmured with disdainful politeness —

“There has evidently been a slight mistake here. Mr. Penarvon, will you be kind enough to take me to my carriage?”

Without a word I led her to the door. On arriving there, to our horror we found that our conveyance had gone, and it was raining in torrents!

At this moment up drove Frogmore's brougham, and out jumped the Duke, face to face with Caroline and myself!

There was no help for it now; we were stranded in the wilds of Regent's Park in evening dress—a bitter winter's night, too. I explained the dilemma in which we were placed as briefly as I could, and introduced him to Caroline. He immediately offered his trap, and we were only too glad to accept it, to enable us to get home.

When he called upon me next day, to accompany him to pay his devoirs to Caroline (for he wasn't the man to let the grass grow under his feet) he told me that La Belle Russe had not appeared to enjoy her dinner particularly; that she flavoured each succeeding course with a sauce piquante, compounded of ornaments from every living language; that, after dinner, the coffee, or something else, did not agree with her; and that she had not her usual good fortune at baccarat.

It is needless to say that after this experience the ladies of the *demi-monde* let Caroline "severely alone."

"'Tis an ill wind, however, that blows no one any good ;" and the Duke was indebted to La Belle Russe, for an introduction to the object of his adoration.

CHAPTER III.

WESTWARD HO!

“To the West—to the West—love with me.”

AT length the run of “Orpheus” came to an end, not because its attraction had fallen off, but because Clerehead, to his great regret, had made previous arrangements with some of “those confounded foreigners,” as he called them.

In anticipation of the termination of Caroline’s engagement, he had been “working the States,” and all kinds of proposals came from America.

He replied, *sans cérémonie*, “All this sort

of thing looks very well on paper, but it's of no use without a banker's reference."

At last one day a tall, smart, keen-eyed American, with a face like a young Greek, very quick, very quiet, very self-possessed, and apparently very well-bred, lounged into Clerehead's den one morning with a cigar in his mouth.

After a few minutes' talk they strolled together down to the American Exchange, then over to Coutts'; and in less than an hour the American tour was settled on terms which I hesitate to repeat, lest they may appear fabulous.

In a month's time Caroline had to sail.

The interval was devoted to preparations. She went over to Paris, taking with her Mrs. Elton and Milly to assist her in the choice of dresses and other feminine frivolities.

On her return she urged me to go with her to the States.

I couldn't.

What was the use of my body going to America, while my soul remained in England?

Then she asked Clerehead to let Milly accompany her; Milly added her entreaties to Caroline's, and so it came to pass that Clerehead actually suffered himself to be persuaded—somewhat reluctantly (for he had a touch of my complaint) to accompany the girls as their escort to America.

Mrs. Le Blanc told me that when he came to make his adieux at Florence Villa, he tried hard to induce Clara to accept an engagement ring, but in vain, that he left the house in anger, though she smiled sweetly, and called after him: "We pray Heaven to have you in its holy keeping."

At Caroline's request I went down to Liverpool to see her off.

Clerehead and I sat in our own room at the

Adelphi the night before they started (to perpetrate an Irishism) until two in the morning over a pipe and a glass of grog.

When we had settled all our business matters he burst out —

“Look here, Bob, every man fights for his own hand, when there’s a woman in the case ; but, so long as we fight fair, there should be no ill-feeling between us ; so, suppose we let that matter slide.

“Now, I want to give you a straight tip.

“Of course, you’ll have to stick to the shop while I’m away ; but a month’s soon gone. When I come back you must cut this game—it isn’t ‘good enough.’ It’s sorry work for you to have nothing better to do than to drill a pack of duffers into the principles of the English language. Sink it, and go into the author line. That ‘Orpheus’ was smart, and you can do better things.”

“But how am I to do better things ?”

“Oh, easy enough—hammer at it—don’t consume the midnight oil though, that’s a grave mistake.

“Turn out at eight—tub—don’t shave; in fact, I wouldn’t shave at all, if I were you; let your beard grow, it looks distinguished, especially when a fellow can cultivate a blacking-brush like yours, under his nose. Have a cup of strong coffee and a rusk. Don’t breakfast until after work. Skim the papers while you swallow your coffee, so as to nail the latest sensation. Then follow Tony Trollope’s advice, get an ounce of cobbler’s wax, stick it on a stool, stick yourself a-top of it, take a double-barrelled pen (one of Gillott’s), best ink and paper you can get, and plenty of it; fire away at nine, and stick to it till one—that’s four hours.

“Lytton did all his wonderful work in three hours a day. He told me so himself. Fact!

“When you’ve spun your reel, dress, and be off to the Club—*déjeûner à la fourchette*

—then you're a gentleman for the rest of the day.

“Don't hide your light under a bushel—show yourself here, there, and everywhere—especially outside a horse. Never miss a big libel case—a first night—a private view of the pictures, or anything of that sort. Be always *en évidence*; make yourself hail-fellow-well-met with the press-gang. Some of them are decent fellows when you come to know 'em. Don't be knocked over by a failure or two—they are nothing when you're used to them. The most successful authors have had the greatest number of failures; hence, they have had the greatest chances of success. Get inside 'the ring,' and you can do pretty well what you like.

“Just look round at the shining lights. There's Bragg, and Bolster, and Bunkum. Bragg was an office boy in the Royal Rafflum Loan Office (Limited), capital about thirty quid, borrowed for the occasion—a post-

dated cheque, and a bill stamp. Sixty per cent. Bill of Sale caper; you know all about it.

“Bolster was a kind of Howell and James’ young man, who was one of my actors, and wasn’t up to much; and Bunkum was a barrister, who never held a brief. All decent chaps in their way; but, dash it all, old fellow, you’ve forgotten more than they ever learnt. So go ahead, dear boy. Only mind! no blank verse, no tights (except for the women!). I prefer bags myself; but, anyhow, draw the line at breeches! Stick to the nineteenth century, ‘the wondrous mother age.’ If you go back to your classic twaddle you’ll come a cropper.

“Here you are, here are a dozen dramas ready-made to your hand in the “D. T.” of to-day. *Imprimis*, an absconding clerk, who robs his employer, a barrister, who got him off when he robbed his first master.

“A woman, whose sister takes her ‘davy

she has been drowneded' in the Thames, and actually recognizes the corpse; only, unfortunately, the woman turns up alive, and swears she isn't dead.

"A druidical doctor, who cremates his kid a-top of a Welsh mountain by moonlight.

"A long firm swindle, an abduction, a murder, a fire, a railway collision, a shipwreck, a bigamous, trigamous, omnivorous beast of a parson, who marries half-a-dozen wives, licks and swindles the lot, seduces his step-daughter, forges a certificate of his child's death, and hands over his progeny to a baby-farmer! Shakespere isn't in it with this lot. Shake 'em up in a bag, dear boy, mix 'em together, and they'll lick your precious Pericles into fits.

"Now observe, young man, if any of these wonderful dramas 'strike ile,' I shall expect a commission.

"By Jingo!" looking at his watch, "I see you won't commence your career as a

dramatist to-morrow, at any rate. Good-night; think of what I've said, old man."

Next morning I went aboard with them, and stayed till the last moment. A few minutes before the steamer weighed anchor, a telegram came to Caroline from the P—, to this effect —

"The P—ss and I wish you great good-fortune in America."

The last bell rang; I bade Clerehead and Milly good-bye.

Then Caroline said, "Write me as soon as you can. If you hear anything, cable, and I'll come at a day's notice. Wish me good-speed. Good-bye; now kiss me, my brother."

With the dove's guilelessness shining through her clear, frank eyes, she lifted her innocent lips to mine; and, midst a mist of tears, we parted.

When I got ashore, I waited to take a last look, when who should I see stroll up the

gangway of the hurricane deck but Frederick Augustus, Duke of Frogmore!

Decidedly that young man is not such a fool as he looks!

They wave their hats and handkerchiefs to me, the great ship moves off amidst the roar of the multitude; and while they are steaming down the Mersey, I am on my way back to my lonely lodgings in Thanet Place.

I find awaiting my arrival this telegram from—

“Fred Bronson, Railway Hotel, Carlisle.

“I have found Jack here. Come at once.”

An hour afterwards I am in the Flying Scotchman, *en route* to the North.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARSON'S ADVENTURE AT CARLISLE.

“This is I, Hamlet the Dane!”

I HAVE already said that our friend Bronson was addicted to field sports. He was going to Ecclefechan (shade of Carlyle!) to run a couple of harriers for a coursing match, and he had invited a friend to accompany him, who had never seen this humane amusement.

They broke their journey at Carlisle, and put up at the Station Hotel. After dinner, of course, Fred enquired of the waiter if there was such a thing as a theatre in the place.

"Dunno about a theater, sir, but there's the Match Box on the sands."

"What do you mean by the 'Match Box?' "

"Why, it's a great big wooden place made of packing cases; so we call it the Match Box."

"Tom," said the parson to his friend, "Eureka! there's a play-house! Slip on your coat, old man, and let's have a look. Perhaps we may see some embryo Kean, or Jordan—who knows?"

"There's many a flower that's doomed to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air!"

And you, my man," to the waiter, "show us the way."

"All right, sir; we can get there in ten minutes."

Passing through the main street, they reached the outskirts of the city; and there, on a dreary sandy flat, stood the "Match Box."

"What are the prices?" enquired the parson.

"Threepence, sixpence, and a shilling; or if you would like a private box, sir, you can have one for five bob."

The parson elected to have a private box.

The "Match Box" was crowded with the proletariat of the city—simple, honest people, who listened to the actors perhaps with more interest and sympathy than more fashionable folk. The play itself was the everlasting "Hamlet." The fourth act was going on; Ophelia was singing—

"How should I your true love know from such another
one?"

The poor girl sang and acted very fairly—in fact, the whole performance was of a very respectable character. The dresses, too, were not inappropriate—the scenery clean, but rather florid. No neutral tints here—honest red, and green, and white, laid on with a trowel.

During the performance perfect silence

prevailed, but when the act-drop descended, flash, puff, crack, lucifers flashing, pipes smoking, nuts cracking, a thousand jaws going. These occupations seemed to afford these worthy people a kind of safety-valve, to emit the animal spirits kept under control, while the actors were on the stage.

Hush! the curtain is going up. Out with pipes, stow the nut-cracking, silence! The last act of the play is about to commence.

The grave-diggers enter, the principal clown is evidently a favourite, for every sentence elicits a roar. When his fooling is done (and excellent fooling it is), he despatches his colleague "to Vaughan for a stoup of liquor;" then crooning out a fragment of an old song, he bestows himself to the completion of Ophelia's grave.

While he is thus engaged, Hamlet and Horatio enter from the back, then, a general hush falls on the audience, as the Prince is heard to enquire —

“Has this fellow no feeling of his business that he sings at grave-making?”

“That voice!” says Bronson, “Tom! Tom! Look, look! Wake up!” for his friend had fallen asleep. “That’s Herbert’s voice, if ever I heard it in my life. And, by Jove, it is he himself!”

Looking at the play-bill, Fred found Hamlet was by Mr. Bellamy.

Now Bronson knew all about Jack’s disappearance, the advertisement in the “Times,” &c., so keeping well out of sight of the stage, he wrote a telegram with his pencil on the back of the playbill, stating that Herbert was found; he then dispatched his friend to the station to forward the message to me, while he mounted guard over the truant.

It will be remembered that Hamlet is never off the stage in the last act, from the time he comes on, until the end of the tragedy—obviously, there was no opportunity for speaking to him until after the curtain fell.

During the performance Bronson kept out of sight, as he had done on a former memorable occasion at Rosemount.

When the play was over he rose. At this moment Hamlet appeared before the curtain to acknowledge the plaudits of the audience. The unusual apparition of the stalwart parson in the private box, in his clerical garb, attracted the attention of the melancholy Dane, and Herbert (for it was he) saw that he was recognized, and strode rapidly off the stage. Bronson left the theatre as quickly as he could, but was obstructed by the people streaming out, for there was no farce, and the performance was over.

When he got to the back of the building, he found himself on the opposite side to the stage entrance; he tried back, and at length reached the stage door, and bolted in without ceremony.

The lights were down, a man and a lad were taking up the green baize.

“ Mr. Bellamy ! Where is Mr. Bellamy ? ”
enquired Fred.

“ There, sir—that’s his dressing-room ! ”
replied the man, pointing to the opposite
side of the stage.

The parson rushed over, calling out —

“ Herbert ! Herbert ! It is I—Bronson ! ”
and, dashing open the first door he came to,
he bounced into the ladies’ dressing-room !

Imagine the poor parson’s consternation
when he found himself face to face with the
“ beauteous majesty of Denmark ”—the fair
Ophelia—young Osric, and another lady,
more or less dressing, or undressed !

The ladies evidently thought some maniac
had burst in among them, and they roused
the theatre with their screams !

Bronson jumped out of the room even
more quickly than he entered it, uttering a
thousand apologies.

By this time, the actors, half dressed,
emerged from the opposite side, and amongst

them the manager, who had acted the King. He was a formidable-looking fellow, six feet high, and it was evident he had a temper of his own, for he let out at Bronson without waiting for the ceremony of an introduction.

“ Confound you, sir ! What do you want in my wife’s dressing-room ? For two pins I’d break every bone in your skin.”

“ Very sorry, I’m sure—quite a mistake.”

“ Mistake, be blanked ! Every civilized being knows that strangers are not admitted behind the scenes of any theatre, however humble. Because our misfortunes have driven us to take shelter in this pigsty, I suppose you think you may insult us with impunity !”

“ I assure you,” exclaimed Bronson, “ I meant no insult. I am a clergyman. The gentleman who played Hamlet is an old friend of mine, and I was anxious to see him—hence this intrusion. I hope, sir, you will accept my apologies, and explain to the ladies how concerned I am at having alarmed them.”

“ Say no more, sir. Say no more. An ‘ affront handsomely acknowledged becomes an obligation.’ I’ll take you to Mr. Bellamy myself.” So saying, the manager led the parson to a small temporary dressing-room in the opposite corner. Approaching the door he knocked gently. No reply. He waited a moment, and then knocked again.

“ Mr. Bellamy,” he said, “ a gentleman, a friend of yours, wishes to see you.”

Still no reply.

“ Strange,” said the manager, and he knocked again, loudly this time. Receiving no answer, he threw open the door. The room was empty, the bird had flown. There lay Hamlet’s street clothes, but there was no Hamlet !

“ Good heavens ! ” exclaimed the manager, “ why, he must have gone home in his stage dress ! I never knew him do that before ; he’s a perfect gentleman, but very eccentric, and we’re obliged to humour him a little. If

you'll wait a moment till I've slipped my traps on, I'll go down with you to his lodgings."

In a few minutes he returned fully equipped.

"One moment," he said ; then, going over to the ladies' dressing-room, he tapped at the door.

"Arabella, my love, Styles shall see you home. Bellamy is in one of his tantrums, and I must look him up. I may be an hour or more, so don't sit up. Ta-ta, darling! This way, sir."

Off they went, right through the city, till they reached the outskirts, in the direction exactly opposite the theatre. Presently they came to a row of cottage houses. They were all so quiet and peaceful, that it seemed as if everybody must have gone to bed long ago. At the very top house of the row, however, there was a light in the window.

"Here we are, and evidently he's up yet." With that, the manager knocked at the door.

It was opened instantly by a little elderly lady, with white hair and a widow's cap.

"Has Mr. Bellamy gone to bed, ma'am?"

"No, Mr. Eccleston, he's not come home yet," said the widow, "but I expect him every minute. Will you step in and wait till he comes?"

"Thank you, m'm; you are very kind, if you won't object to my pipe. Sorry I can't offer you a cigar, sir."

Bronson produced his well-seasoned briar-root, and smiled benignantly as he replied —

"This is worth more to me than all the cigars imported from Havannah. It has been my soother, companion, friend, for I don't know how long."

The parson and the player puffed away at their pipes, and at first the time passed pleasantly enough.

When Eccleston thawed, Bronson found him "another good man gone wrong." He had been "plucked" at Oxford, got stage-

struck, took a London theatre, acted Romeo, lost three or four thousand pounds in a month, fell in love with Juliet, and married her. Banished by his family, and disinherited by his father, he went into the country to act; failed miserably, lost an only child, took to drink, got from bad to worse, was driven out of the respectable theatres. Then he resolved to "put in the peg;" became a total abstainer, and now was in a fair way to retrieve the past.

"The misfortune is," he said, "I've discovered that I'm a cruel, bad actor. I shall never do much that way—but I flatter myself I know something about stage-management; and Arabella, my wife (the lady who played Ophelia)—ah! she'll 'strike ile,' depend upon it, one of these fine days."*

Time passed; the poor little widow got

* Arabella has "struck ile." She made a wonderful hit at the Great International the other day, and Eccleston is stage-manager at the Megatherium, at a very handsome salary.

tired, and the men became impatient. Twelve o'clock, one, two, yet no sign of Herbert.

At length the parson enquired --

"Has he ever been out so late as this before, ma'am?"

"Never, sir."

"I really don't think we ought to trespass on this lady any longer, Mr. Eccleston," said Bronson.

"Nor I either," the manager replied. "I'm very sorry, Mrs. Wilton, that we've kept you up so late."

"Don't mention it, gentlemen," said the little woman; "but should any harm come to the poor gentleman—oh! dear, oh! deary me. I can't bear to think of it."

"Let us hope for the best," quoth the parson, leaving his card and half-a-sovereign. "You'll let me know the moment he comes back, won't you?"

"Oh! yes. You may be sure of that," replied the widow.

And so they bade her good-night, or rather, good-morning, and made the best of their way to the hotel, where they found Fred's friend in a terrible state of anxiety. He was not too anxious, however, to do ample justice to the substantial supper which awaited them.

They kept it up so late, that Bronson was fast asleep when I routed him out at about ten o'clock the next morning. As soon as he realized where he was, Fred told me the story I have here endeavoured to relate.

After breakfast we strolled down to the "Match Box." The players were rehearsing the music of *Macbeth* (and very well they did it, too).

After the experience of the preceding night, the parson was very punctilious in sending in his card, and I, of course, sent mine. Eccleston came out, and we were ceremoniously introduced. He was really a fine distinguished-looking fellow. Apparently very much depressed, he said to Bronson —

“ I was coming to see you, sir. I got this note five minutes ago by the second postal delivery. It is endorsed outside —

“ ‘ Immediate and important. Too late to obtain a stamp.’ ”

There was no mistake about the hand.

The letter was to this effect —

“ My DEAR MR. ECCLESTON,

“ I am compelled to terminate my engagement at a moment’s notice. My absence will, I am afraid, inconvenience you ; but there is no help for it. Like poor Lear —

‘ To deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.’

“ Forgive and forget me as soon as possible. Make my respectful adieux to Mrs. Eccleston, and believe that your kindness and consideration, will never be forgotten by the unfortunate

“ BELLAMY.”

Baffled again !

Inviting the manager to accompany us, we went first to Herbert's lodgings.

On our way thither Eccleston informed us that " Mr. Bellamy " had joined the company a short time previous at Dumfries—that he was very quiet and reserved, but somewhat strange in his manner—rarely or ever speaking to anyone out of the business of the theatre, and, in point of fact, this was all the information I could obtain.

Upon arriving at the lodgings, we found Herbert had not returned, nor had he sent any message. Thence we went to the Police Office, where we could obtain no clue whatever to his mysterious disappearance. It was only too evident that he had left the city.

Of course it was useless to further prolong my stay ; so thanking Bronson for his trouble, and desiring Eccleston to write if any news transpired—cruelly disappointed and utterly disheartened, I again returned to town.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDERED.

“Not to be with you, not to see your face,
Alas! for me, then, my good days are done!”

THE gulf continues to widen imperceptibly between Clara and me.

She is always preoccupied, and I am always embarrassed and distant.

I have occasional evidence that, though Clerehead is on the other side of the “ditch,” he contrives to keep his memory green in Regent’s Park.

I am bidden to dinner the third Sunday after his departure, to partake of some canvas-

back ducks and other transatlantic delicacies, which he has sent from Staten Island. I know I am an ass, but those canvas-back ducks stick in my gizzard, or, rather, would have done so, had I tried to swallow them, so I send Cassidy on Sunday morning with a note to Mrs. Le Blanc, pleading a severe headache, and saying that the doctor has prescribed a pull on the river.

I go and I row, and am about as lively as Charon taking toll on the Styx.

When night falls, I am watching her chamber as usual—always watching.

I am not invited the following Sunday. Of course not, for Clerehead has returned, and the fattened calf is to be killed in honour of his arrival. I wait, and watch. Am I a man or a beast that I do these things? Alas! I love her—I love her—that is all!

He comes to dinner, elate and confident; but, thank goodness, he goes away early,

and depressed—there is some comfort in that!

It is summer now. The window is open. Hark! she is singing the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire's old song from "The Stranger."

" I have a silent sorrow here,
A grief I'll ne'er impart;
It breathes no sigh, it sheds no tear,
But it consumes my heart."

Then she breaks down and weeps—and I cannot be there to soothe, to console her! If I only dared—if I—but she rises, puts out the light, retires, and "leaves the world to darkness and to me."

My visits become rarer, and rarer still.

Sometimes I call on Mrs. Le Blanc about some trifling literary matters, in which we are jointly interested, especially an adaptation of an unacted play of Shakespere, which (despite Clerehead's dictum), I think, will, nay, shall, set the Thames on fire some day,

or night. There is a big dual part for Clara, and she knows it, yet, though she listens and listens, with her great beautiful eyes dilating, her bosom palpitating, she doesn't condescend to utter one word. I put it to any reasonable man, especially to any author, if this is not hard to bear?

Mrs. Le Blanc says all sorts of kind things, but *she* remains silent. I am silent too, and then I suddenly remember I have an appointment, and take my leave abruptly.

I have not only ceased to dine at Florence Villa on Sunday, but I have also ceased to escort Clara to church.

Clerehead takes her two Sundays running, but his piety and his patience are both exhausted by the effort. Even for her sake, he can't stand Father P—'s sermons (and I don't wonder at it; I can't stand 'em myself!) so she goes alone, for the future.

She is a devout Catholic, and attends

regularly to her devotions. I am not a Catholic, and I am not devout, still, I find myself at her church regularly every Sunday, that is, at Vesper time (for Father P—doesn't preach then!) Each Sunday I resolve that I will go no more, and then I end by saying, "I will go to-night; 'tis the last time." And so it is—till the next time comes!

She sits aloft with the choir, and sings; I sit below, and listen. When she leaves the church, I dog her footsteps home, and wait and watch as usual, and then return to my solitary chambers and dream myself to sleep. The days pass into weeks, the weeks into months, until at length a year, a whole weary year, has passed away.

"Thus, while the past is surely gone,
The gloomy future still unseen,
I think of what I might have won,
And fancy things that should have been."

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

CHAPTER I.

I AM A SUCCESSFUL DRAMATIST.

“ Seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is ? ”

AMERICA is the paradise for fair women, and during the past twelve months, Caroline has set the States on fire—from New York to the City with the Golden gates—with the light of her genius, and the radiance of her beauty.

I seek not to depreciate her rare gifts, though I could wish they had better scope

than in my miserable "Orpheus." It does seem hard, though; here is my poor darling eating her heart out with disappointed ambition.

Clever as he is, what an ass Clerehead must be! With his opportunities for pulling the strings, and manipulating public opinion, he might have made her the greatest creature of the age; then, her vanity flattered, her ambition gratified, her heart might be touched. And then, alas! what would become of me? Am I selfish that I thank God he hasn't the brains to think of this? Perhaps!

To return to Caroline; in this incredibly short period she has (so Clerehead tells me) made a large fortune; and he is going over "the ditch," to advise her how to invest it in mortgages, in mines, in landed estate, in petroleum springs, and Heaven knows what besides! And then he is to bring her and Milly home.

All this in twelve short months!

Only think! Great Fanny Kemble, Glorious Helen Faucit; Goddesses! Pallas, Herè, Aphrodite, Thalia, Melpomene — All the Muses incarnate in flesh and blood! Macready, greatest tragedian in the universe; Admirable, accomplished, and gentlemanly Charles Kean; Rugged Sam Phelps, one of our best tragedians, and certainly the greatest comedian in the world; Genial Charles Mathews, Jovial Bucky, Rare old Ben: all these choice and master spirits, toiled and struggled from youth to age, and esteemed themselves lucky to be enabled to retire upon a miserable pittance of a few thousand pounds; while this girl of five-and-twenty, and others, with not a scintillation of her ability, leap at one bound to fame and fortune!

“A mad world, my masters”—a world where the best showman is the best actor, and the greatest author!

But what am I to sneer at my brother

charlatans—I, who have turned showman myself?

Yes! I have taken Clerehead's advice, and find it much pleasanter, and far more profitable, to write plays than to act them; and, strange to say, the British public, who wouldn't stand my play-acting, will stand my plays! Poor, stupid B. P.!

Then, I've dropped my lines in pleasant places. I've encountered a man of genius, in the shape of a manager. A man did I say? I don't do him justice. He is "three single gentlemen rolled into one"—actor, author, and manager combined; Garrick, Rich, and Sheridan in one and the same person, with a dash of E. T. Smith and Phineas T. Barnum into the bargain!

My manager's modesty is even greater than his skill. He blandly tells the public that he is the greatest author, actor, and manager in the world; and if he tells them so long enough, I shouldn't be surprised if

they begin to believe him, by-and-bye—in fact, I'm not sure but some people begin to believe him already !

We collaborate, that is to say, I suggest a subject, he suggests a distinction without a difference ; I invent a plot, he suggests an alteration ; I suggest a hansom cab, and a live horse, a steam engine, a railway train, and a fishing smack, then he caps me with a coach and four horses (alive), two steam engines, two trains, and a collision (real, of course), and a schooner, full rigged and in full sail, that works round, sending her bowsprit on a voyage of discovery into the dress circle !

My collaborator has got his head screwed on rightly. He is wise in his generation, and, having accurately gauged the intelligence of his public, he gives it exactly what it wants. Apart from this, he is a generous, large-hearted fellow, and we understand each other perfectly. He gets all our wonderful “pro-

perties'' made cheaply, and sells them, when we've done with them, at prime cost. Between us, we've abolished those nuisances "front scenes."

As for the dialogue, that's quite a secondary consideration. I spin it off by the yard, as the spider spins her web, and he cuts it, and spoils it occasionally (at least, so I think); but he says that's mere prejudice on my part. Anyhow, I don't complain, it "pleases him and doesn't hurt me;" and if the dear, intelligent British public, is satisfied with the article we manufacture, what does it matter?

While I play on the organ, my friend blows the bellows, and advertises our joint productions splendidly. Then we dispose of the provincial and American rights for fabulous sums, and divide the plunder between us.

We have already arranged for our next production, "My Wife's Sister's Husband," to be translated into every European tongue; indeed, I should not be surprised if it were

done in Hindostanee, Chinese, and Japanese, Sanscrit, Choktong, and Cherokee. It is nearly long enough, if not quite (seven acts and fifteen tableaux). If our great sensation, "The Battle of the Balloons," with "the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue," doesn't "knock 'em," why the sacking of the House of Lords, and the cremation of the Bench of Bishops, by the Amazonian army of wives' sisters, is bound to "fetch 'em."

This will be the most realistic scene the stage has ever witnessed. No wretched supers, but ladies, live ladies, all real wives' sisters, "condemned to pine and wither on the virgin thorn" through the barbarity of the Hereditary Legislature. Then the peers of the minority, real, live peers (in real peers' robes, none of your Iolanthe trumperies), have kindly promised their valuable services for the occasion, in consideration of my friend providing their sons and daughters with

suitable openings in his next pantomime, at the customary guinea a week for beginners.

Thus, by following Clerehead's advice, at a bound I have leaped into the foremost rank of living dramatists !

" Evil communications corrupt good manners." Naturally I find it my game to join in the chorus of depreciation of Shakespere, Lytton, Sheridan Knowles, and other old-fashioned fogies.

Shakespere never wrote " My Wife's Sister's Husband." He couldn't do it. Psha ! Away with the cap and bells !

If, instead of being a concoctor of sordid melodrame, I could soar to Olympian heights which would qualify me to touch the hem of " the master's " singing robes, even that crowning glory of my life, would be but " as sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals," unless she were by my side to share it with me.

But she !—alas !

CHAPTER II.

THE STROLLERS.

“He entrenched himself in his cruel pride,
Nor deigned he a single word to speak,
Nor dreamt he once of her bitter tears,
Or the stricken heart that was nigh to break.”

I AM making my fortune in London by my
rubbishing plays—Caroline has already made
hers in America. Clara has entirely recovered
her health ; but where is he—our old, our only
friend—where is Herbert ?

It will be remembered that the last time he
ever saw Caroline was at the moment when
he rescued her from the fire.

During his delirium he was, of course, un-

conscious of the agonies of her parting, of the bitter check to her pure and proud ambition, in being compelled to prostitute her great genius to the lowest form of art, solely in order to rescue him from his difficulties; nay, to actually provide him with the means of subsistence, during his illness.

He dreamt not of the anguish of the faithful heart whose whole life was one lament for her lost love. He only knew that since the time he had imperilled his life to save hers, he had never once seen her—never once heard from her.

Alas! how should he know that she had written repeatedly, that her letters had arrived during the period of his unconsciousness, and that, by some fatality, they had miscarried, and were lost?

As for Clara, I solemnly believe—believe? I *know*, that if, during that unfortunate interview at Harrogate, he had given her the slightest chance, she would have told him of

the arrival, and subsequent miscarriage of those fateful letters!

After this, she awaited their coming from day to day with impatience and anxiety, resolved to deliver them to him the moment they arrived.

While she watched and waited, came the arrest at Claremount, with its subsequent train of horrors; and so the opportunity passed, never to return.

On the face of her continued silence, it seemed to Herbert's distempered mind, that Caroline had deserted him. Besides this, he considered she had degraded herself and him by appearing in a class of entertainment which she knew he loathed. I, too, had been *particeps criminis* to the transaction, inasmuch as I had written the hateful piece, and doubtless, he thought, negotiated the engagement.

He saw, too (for the unhappy man de-

voured every line that was written about her), her name continually and intimately associated, in certain scandalous society papers, with that of Frogmore. To-day, it was announced they were engaged; to-morrow, it was delicately insinuated they were married, or, if not, that they *ought* to be!

Then the agonies of grief, rage, jealousy, and despair tortured his proud heart, and preyed upon his very vitals. In one little hour, he might have ascertained the utter falsity of these infamous *canards*; but his cruel pride always intervened. In prosperity, it had been his besetting sin; in adversity, it had become something far worse.

At length came my advertisement. That very day he also saw the announcement of her marriage with Frogmore, which filled the cup of his anger to overflowing.

“So they would pension me, I suppose!” he exclaimed.

Then he wrapped himself up more closely

than ever in the bitterness of his delusive disdain.

O'Brien had said, but too truly, that poor Jack had a "kink" in his brain, occasioned doubtless, by the ruffianly outrage at Bolingbroke; and this, combined with his now dangerous delusion on the subject of Caroline's supposed perfidy, fairly upset his reason!

He was at the zenith of his powers; he had only to hold his finger up, and he might have been engaged at any theatre in the kingdom; instead of which he shunned sympathy, nursed his despair, and, like the Spartan boy of old, suffered it to devour his heart in silence.

At last he saw in the newspapers that *she* and the Duke had gone to America together!

From that moment, though quite self-contained and reasonable upon all other topics, upon that particular subject he became

a confirmed monomaniac. Of course, the poor fellow's mania was the more strongly developed, because it was confined to his own bosom. His lips were sealed. Believing himself abandoned by me, he had no friend to whom he could unburden his sorrow. He was alone—evermore alone!

Even now, it appears to me incredible, that he did not realize that so long as I, his old comrade, had a home, or a shilling, he should never want for either. Howsoever that might be, he still held aloof; and, despite our repeated advertisements, and continual enquiries, we could obtain no information regarding him.

What became of him during this long and dreary interregnum, I do not know, even to this day.

Long after, however, certain memoranda which fell into my hands, afforded me some clue to, at least, one of his many bitter experiences.

In a previous portion of this narrative, I have stated, that he did some little kindness to a company of itinerant players, who were in trouble through their primitive theatre being blown down upon a certain memorable Christmas.

About a month after his mysterious disappearance from Carlisle, these poor people were located at a small town amidst the mountains of Yorkshire.

It was the very place where, some few years before, the Vicar's daughters, their shawls thrown over their heads, after the homely fashion of the district, were wont to come nightly to see the play.

I have often wondered whether Charlotte, when she saw Rachel in the *Théâtre de la Monnaie*, on the memorable occasion described so vividly in "*Villette*," recalled the poor rural players in their canvas-topped shed in her native village.

Night was falling, and the snow lay heavy and deep upon the ground for miles and miles around, when a tall, gaunt man strode wearily along till he came to anchor in front of Wylder's "Thespian Temple" at Haworth. He was clad in a great loose military-looking overcoat, the collar of which stood up to his ears. Round his neck was a white woollen muffler, and a soft, dark, clerical felt hat was pulled down over his brows, so that, between the muffler and the hat, his face was completely concealed.

Immediately adjacent was the van in which the manager's family lived and travelled from place to place. The smoke curled briskly out of the small-spouted iron chimney; the white curtains looked clean, and bright, and tidy; and the fire, from within, reflected a ruddy glow through the windows.

After a moment's pause, the stranger approached the door, knocked, and enquired for the manager.

“Come in!” exclaimed a cheery voice. “It’s a gay night, for sure, to be standing out in the snow. Come in, lad, and tak’ a smell o’t fire, and let’s see what I can do for you.”

The man stepped into the van, and threw off his coat and hat.

The moment the manager caught sight of his face, he exclaimed —

“Gracious God! why, Mary, wench, it’s Maister Herbert!”

And so it was.

Many and many a weary mile had he tramped through the snow, before he reached this harbour of refuge.

Without circumlocution, he stated that he was seeking an engagement. As it was essential to preserve his incognito, for fear of arrest, he couldn’t act in his own old towns, nor under his own name. He said also, that he had neither properties nor dresses, and that he couldn’t study a single line, but, in all his

old parts, he was still available. Then he broke down, and said he wanted bread!

Poor Jack! what he must have suffered to come to that! I don't mean to want bread, but to *avow* that he wanted it!

The manager roared out —

“Here, I say, missus, whiskey and hot watter, ham and eggs! Thear, thear, sit down. Lord love your dear heart; sit down, Captin, mak' yoursen at home. Off with them wet boots. Here, Mary, *luv*, hand over them stockings. Thear you are, sir!” and he took Herbert in his great strong arms as if he were a baby, put him into the chair before the fire, pulled off his damp boots and stockings, chafed his poor frozen feet into life, clapped on them a pair of warm Shetland hose, and his own slippers, and forced a stiff tumbler of boiling whiskey and water down his throat, “just to restore the circulation,” as he said, “while the missus was a gettin' the tay ready.”

This genial welcome knocked Herbert over altogether; for, despite his infernal pride, when touched in the right place, he was as gentle as a woman. Presently, however, he recovered, and it must be confessed did ample justice to Mrs. Wylder's humble but substantial repast.

Then Tom Wylder, a fine, big, burly Yorkshireman (he was manager and principal tragedian and comedian to boot!) said —

“Now, look here, Maister John, it isn't for a grand gen'leman like you to pal with the likes of us; but if you'll cum' and tak' the best we can give—may God do so much to me and more—if you shan't be to me as my father was that's dead, or the little brother that's in heaven!

“Look here, sythee. I've gotten two hundred goolden suv'rins in t' lucky bag. Turn 'em out, missus, and I'll send to Sam May's for t' props, this blessed minit. You shall act when you like, and what you like;

I'll tog you up like a prince, and you shall be boss o' t' show. Thear, s'help me God !”

I've suffered honest Tom's adjuration to remain exactly as he uttered it, in the hope that if the recording angel happened to be in the neighbourhood he will not remember it, to the poor stroller's disadvantage, at the day of reckoning.

For twelve months and more—"the world forgetting, and by the world forgot"—Herbert acted all his old famous parts in small towns and villages, under the unpretentious pseudonym of Mr. Barton.

Amongst these humble, but faithful, friends, his slightest wish was anticipated, and his will was law ; everybody loved him, but the women and children adored him.

His health was partially restored ; more important still, his mind was gradually recovering its balance, when, alas ! his honest friend Tom was struck down with typhoid

fever, and died after a few days of excruciating suffering.

The troupe was disbanded, and poor Jack was once more cast on the world ; yet still he made no sign !

Two months or more passed without his earning a shilling. When he had got to his last sovereign he started forth upon an aimless journey.

That very day—that very hour—Caroline left New York, accompanied by almost royal honours, valedictory addresses, bands of music, and other Barnum and Bunkum demonstrations, thinking all the while only of the man who, weary and footsore, frozen with cold, and famished with hunger, was again tramping through the cruel winter's snow, over the dreary wolds of Yorkshire.

CHAPTER III.

CLEREHEAD GETS HIS CONGÉ.

“ Then learned I, from the sudden start
Of jealous pain,
That I had found within my heart,
My youth again ! ”

I MET Caroline at Liverpool, on her return from America, with Clerehead. Of course she was attended by Milly and Frogmore. They all appeared to have benefited by their travels.

Her first words to me were of Herbert. I could not find it in my heart to tell her of Bronson's adventure at Carlisle, and as yet I

knew nothing myself, of the episode, related in the last chapter.

I really thought poor Jack was dead; in fact, I was convinced he was, feeling assured that if alive, he must have seen the advertisements, and that he would not remain obdurate to the continued appeals of his old friend. She, however, would not entertain the idea of his death for a moment.

“If he were dead,” said she, quietly, but apparently with profound belief, “I should know it, because I should have seen him.”

Of course, after this, there was no more to be said.

After a few weeks' rest, she prepared for her forthcoming engagement at the Frivolity, and I was hard at work upon my new idyll, “The Judgment of Paris,” in which she had selected Aphrodite, for her reappearance.

Frogmore continued her devoted friend and servant; he had had many temptations among

the fair Americans ; “ there’s such divinity doth hedge ” a duke that half the bright eyes in the States tried to lure him from his allegiance, but in vain.

Poor lad ! I knew (for I heard from her every week, as she heard from me) that his, like mine, was a hopeless passion ; but I suppose he felt, like myself, and “ the other one ” —

“ ’Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all ! ”

Howsoever that might be, he continued indefatigable in his attentions.

As for Caroline, she never went out without Milly, nor Milly without her, and neither of them stirred abroad without Frogmore.

The world allotted them both to him with impartial alternation. To-day he was engaged to Caroline—to-morrow to Milly. It was hard to say which of the two, was the more detested by Belgravian mothers, who had marked him for their own proper prey, and who gnashed

their teeth (if they had any!) when they beheld these girls at all first nights, concerts, exhibitions, and the like, attended by their devoted cavalier.

During the past twelve months Milly had ripened into a beautiful young woman, and her fair fresh loveliness, contrasted admirably with Caroline's superb, pale majesty.

It was one of the sights of the season to see them in the Row, for their habits became them to perfection, and they were both admirable horsewomen.

Clerehead and Clara, too, rode together in the Park frequently. He had improved a little in his equitation, while, as for her, I think she could have lived on horseback. Her *personelle* was so striking and distinguished that no one could look on any other woman while she was present. Hence I really think that, apart from his increasing regard, his vanity was flattered by the general and involuntary homage paid to her beauty.

Our friend the "Gipsey" was in town, and very often gave me a mount, so that I was not altogether left in the cold.

One lovely afternoon we were trying to get through the crowd at "The Corner," when a certain illustrious personage came and "declared on" to my friend. Of course, I dropped into the rear. Presently who should we encounter but Caroline, Milly, and the Duke?

The distinguished personage I have mentioned, immediately left us, and went to pay his devoirs to Caroline, and to make enquiries about the American trip, &c.

Just at this moment who should emerge from the throng in the opposite direction but Clerehead and Clara?

The two women had never met since the night of "The Rival Queens," and I trembled with anxiety, for I really knew not what might happen. Fortunately the crowd was so great that they passed without recognizing each

other, whereupon I breathed freely and cantered on.

Sooner or later, however, they must meet, and then—what then?

A week afterwards we received invitations for the Academy soirée. As yet none of us had seen the pictures. Clerehead was to be Clara's cavalier, and I had promised to escort Mrs. Le Blanc.

When I arrived at Florence Villa I found the ladies dressed, and Clerehead first in the field. He was, as usual, endeavouring to make himself agreeable, but this time not succeeding according to his wont. Clara was *distracte*, and Mrs. Le Blanc looked *géné*; in point of fact, she always did so when Clerehead was to the fore. The poor dear used to tell me, that he generally contrived to make her feel she was one too many. Indeed, she often proposed to retire but Clara would rarely, if ever, permit her to

do so, hence my presence for once seemed a timely relief to everyone.

Mrs. Le Blanc bustled about and gave me a cup of tea. She knew that I have a feminine weakness for "the deadly cup," so she kept the best, and always brewed it afresh for me.

Crossing her fingers to signify that Clara is out of temper, she whispers —

"And I don't wonder at it, Robert, for what do you think? That abominable trunk which we lost on our journey to Harrogate, after all this time has 'turned up' to-day, and I don't know where it hasn't been to. To the North Pole I should think from its dilapidated appearance. Everything is destroyed except Clara's little writing-case, and she has made as much fuss about that, as if it were filled with Bank of England notes, instead of a dozen or two dirty old letters."

At this moment the carriage draws up at the door, and Clerehead, looking at his watch, says —

"Time's up."

Mrs. Le Blanc says —

"Robert, you are my cavalier. Come and see what a nice *boutonnière* I've got for you."

I retire into the back part of the room, and submit to my button-holing like a martyr. I hear Clerehead, who is sitting beside Clara on an ottoman at the other end of the room, say significantly —

"Bob is always button-holed. Must I go undecorated?"

I am standing with my back to them, but the mirror before me reflects what is going on in the opposite direction. For the second time I have reason to feel grateful to a piece of plate glass.

Clara rises mechanically, and wearily, it seems to me, plucks a flower or two from her bouquet—is in the act of placing it in Clerehead's coat, when he does something which sends every drop of blood in my body in one rush to my heart, and then, in another moment

(or surely my heart must have burst), back into my knuckles !

Let me endeavour to describe the incident accurately.

At the moment she is in the act of placing the posy in his button-hole, he whispers in her ear. Then suddenly he clasps her waist with his left arm, and draws her closely to him. In a flash, her two hands are upon his chest—with the impact, they both recoil a couple of paces distance, and stand looking at each other, eye to eye.

There is a ring in his hand, a posy in hers.

She flings the unoffending flowers in the fire—he throws the ring in after it. She goes over to the piano, and improvises a fantasia, as we return to the front room. All this is done quietly, noiselessly, and in far less time than it takes to describe.

“Good people,” says Clara. “I am *désolée*. Our friend here, has bethought

him of a most important engagement, which will preclude the possibility of his taking us to see the pictures to-night."

"Yes, most important," replied Clerehead. "By Jove! I fear I shall be late as it is. I know you will excuse me, so *au revoir*."

"No," said Clara, gravely. Then rising and making a stately curtsy. "Not '*au revoir*!' *Adieu*!—Mr. Clerehead."

"Adieu then," he replied, and bowing with dignity, he left the room.

A moment later, and his carriage was being driven furiously away.

That was his last visit to Florence Villa. He had played his best card—played it badly, and lost the game!

Ten minutes before I hated the man, now I felt sorry for him—but the two women (how barbarous are women to those that love them—upon my honour, I think they are worse even than men!) were perfectly ebullient.

Mrs. Le Blanc, who had never attempted to disguise her aversion for Clerehead, knew, and rejoiced to know, that her enemy was discomfited and had got his *cong  *—while Clara appeared as if she had shaken off an incubus. I alone remained sad and silent. “A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind.” It was his turn to-day—it might be mine to-morrow.

Mrs. Le Blanc, however, soon recalled me to myself.

“Now, Robert,” she said, “this is like old times—you’ll have to escort us both. I’ll send round to Clarke’s for the brougham”—and then she whispered archly—“I think my posy has brought you luck, sir!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE PICTURE.

“Would you not deem it breathed, and that these veins
Did verily bear blood?”

THE Academy was more than usually crowded. All the world and his wife were there. Princes and Princesses of the blood jostled with great generals and gallant admirals, their breasts ablaze with medals won in famous battles by land and sea. The Grand Old Man and his charming wife “beamed” upon the Lord of Burleigh as if they had never broken a lance together; the airy young Chancellor appeared to chum with the grim leader of the Home Rulers. The

man with "the coat of many colours" triumphantly displayed in his button-hole the latest thing in orchids; the great Marquis looked less glum than usual; and the gracious President (more like Roman Antony than ever) did the honours with his accustomed urbanity. The Foreign Ambassadors, the Chinese Legation, the Japanese Embassy, a famous Indian Prince (a charming person—fresh from the dethronement and murder of his brother!), glittered with all the jewels of the Orient, while Bishops and Archbishops *en grande tenue*, commingled with Judges, and heaven-born hereditary legislators. The Lord Mayor, and other city magnates, sedately splendid in black velvet, steel buttons, and civic chains, for once vouchsafed to rub shoulders with the motley mob of authors, orators, savants, African and Arctic travellers—lawyers, painters, publishers, sculptors, soldiers, sailors, journalists, and even actors and other obscure persons.

Conspicuous amongst a constellation of feminine loveliness, magnificently attired in the latest novelty from Worth's *atelier*, resplendent with gems, gorgeous in laces, eccentric and wonderful in gloves, ravishing in the most bewitching of coiffures, stood forth "La Belle Russe." No one knew by what back-stairs influence this woman had gained admittance into this select *coterie*; but there she was, convoyed by her latest conquest, a tall, handsome wealthy young Attaché of the Austrian Legation, and holding her own with characteristic insolence and superb audacity.

I have given but a faint idea of the brilliant scene which met our eyes as we entered. The murmur of a thousand pleasant voices, with hundreds of brave men and beautiful women moving in graceful motion, made a picturesquely magnificent *ensemble*.

To-night Clara was something like her old self. She beamed with life and gaiety; and

as we moved from picture to picture, she noted, with unerring accuracy, the features of the exhibition.

Caroline and Milly (who had preceded us but a few moments) attracted more attention than the glowing canvases which lined the walls, and indeed they entirely eclipsed the living beauties who surrounded them.

As they moved slowly towards the central room, accompanied by Frogmore, who, as usual, was their escort, they encountered an excited crowd which had congregated in front of one picture. The loud hum of voices subsided into silence, and the distinguished mob opened out on either side as the two girls approached.

The silence then gave way to a general movement of eager curiosity.

“La Belle Russe” superciliously levelled her *pince-nez* at Caroline; but the first gentleman in the room (or in Europe, for

that matter) deliberately placed himself between her and the Russian, as he said —

“Miss Challoner, permit me to show you something which must, I am sure, possess special interest for you.” Then he led her forward to the picture.

It was the “counterfeit presentment” of Hamlet and Ophelia before referred to. Though only life size, the figures appeared of almost colossal magnitude. Caroline scarcely cast one glance at her own likeness—all lovely though it was; she had eyes only for Him. There he stood, attired exactly as he was when last they had met on the night of the fire—the leonine head, the fell of golden hair, the true and tender eyes—fixed full upon her own—the majestic figure in the very act of springing forth from the canvas.

For a moment she remained motionless—the blood rushed to her brow, went back to her heart—then she turned pale as death;

and, without a sound, even as she had fallen before his feet upon that awful night when he had plucked her from the jaws of death, even so she fell now, void of sense and motion.

At this very instant, while all around stood awed and spell-bound, as fate, or accident, would have it, we reached the spot. As Clara caught sight of the picture, she, too, stood transfixed. There, upon the ground, lay the woman *He* loved ; and there, towering above her, stood the woman who loved *Him* ! Both young, lovely, and beloved, rich in all the world's choicest gifts, yet hungering fiercely, pining their proud hearts away, for one man's love—that man, alas ! an outcast, and a wanderer on the face of the earth.

Meanwhile, society stood dazed, as it contemplated the most striking picture exhibited in the Academy that night ; the meeting of those two unhappy women beneath the fateful shadow of the unfortunate man, whom they had both

“Loved, not wisely, but too well !”

Caroline lay with her head reclined in profile, as it were, upon her right arm, which was extended towards the picture ; her dark hair, bursting from the knot which bound it, covered her neck and shoulders, as with an iridescent mantle of sable, through which the other arm gleamed, white and beautiful as ivory ; while Clara stood erect, her hands clenched, her teeth fixed, her eyes still riveted on the picture.

Thus, for a moment, we all stood, as if transformed to stone ; the first to break the spell was Milly, who threw herself beside her friend, and, with the Duke's aid, tenderly lifted her head from the ground, resting it upon her knee.

A distinguished-looking old gentleman, who turned out to be Sir Henry H——, the eminent physician, came forward, and kneeling beside Caroline, felt her pulse and closed her eyelids. With a reassured look, he whispered

something to the P——; then, turning to Clara, he tried to unclasp her hands, but tried in vain. Then he bade me get her home immediately.

“There is no danger,” he said; “nothing but a sudden shock to the nervous system. A few days’ rest, and she will be quite well.”

Finding that Caroline was being cared for, Mrs. Le Blanc and I endeavoured to lead Clara away; but she remained rigid and immovable, and we could not induce her to stir from the spot.

A mob is a mob everywhere—whether they are attired in swallow-tailed coats, and *décolletée* dresses, or in the rags and wretchedness of the slums; save that I think your fashionable mob the least sympathetic in existence.

Opinions were divided as to the tragedy going on before their eyes.

Some regarded it as Clerehead’s last

sensational advertisement for Caroline's reappearance at the Frivolity; others, as a remarkably fine tableau vivant, devised between the two women to attract attention to the picture of Hamlet and Ophelia.

"La Belle Russe," with a shrug of her ample shoulders, lounged languidly across the room, leaving Caroline and Clara to their numerous sympathizers.

"Chut! Chut!" she murmured, contemptuously, to the Austrian. "I don't believe in women who faint, especially these play-acting people. It's one of the tricks of their trade. By-the-bye, who is the man? For, of course, there *is* a man in the case."

Leisurely adjusting her *pince-nez*, she proceeded to take stock of the picture. Then, just as if she had been appraising a horse, a bullock, or some other beast of burden, she continued —

“H’m! I understand. A fair piece of flesh for those hussies to fight about. Who is this young Heracles with the golden mane and big blue eyes, who looks as if he is going to leap upon and devour us all?”

“Oh! I suppose one of the actor people,” the Austrian replied.

“This an actor? Psha! Nonsense! It isn’t good form for the players to be manly, nowadays. They are nothing if not epicene. Half-a-dozen of those play-actor creatures wouldn’t make a man like this. He is, for all the world, like one of those brawny, Gothic gladiators that the Roman women went mad about in the days of the Lower Empire; and I must say I rather admire their taste. Do you know, Oscar, I protest the Slav blood in my veins stirs, when I think of those women descending into the arena to fight for their men, in the eyes of all Rome. Ah! ‘life was real, life was earnest;’ life was worth living in those days. We are getting

sadly too civilized. Yonder people of the pavement have the pull of us—they say what they mean, and do what they like, while we— Ah! if we could only rise superior to vulgar prejudice, the world would become endurable by-and-bye!”

“Why don’t you put yourself forward, then, in the march of enlightenment, *ma chère* Princesse?” blandly enquired the Austrian.

“Why? Because, look you, in this excellent England, your parson does not practise what he preaches, so I preach what I may not practise. Besides, there is my husband! Why husbands were ever invented I can’t understand, except to pay one’s debts. Demetrius never pays mine though; *au contraire*, I have to pay his, as well as my own.

“Go away—you are a bad boy—and I—well, I’ll think of it. Meanwhile I will take tea, and you shall talk scandal—I like both;

we can imbibe the one and emit the other at the same time." And so they moved away.

By this time Caroline's carriage was waiting—the Duke and one of his friends lifted her gently from the ground, and moved with her towards the vestibule, accompanied by Milly and the doctor.

Clara, quietly extricating herself from Mrs. Le Blanc and myself, turned and followed—her hands still clenched together, and her eyes fixed.

The crowd gave way, and we kept side by side with her. When we reached the doors, Caroline was lifted into the carriage and Clara halted on the threshold—following the departing vehicle with eager eyes, until it disappeared. Then she began to thaw—her bosom heaved convulsively—her hands relaxed—and were stretched forth, as if in mute entreaty; inarticulate sounds struggled

to her lips, until at last I could distinguish the words —

“ Alas ! alas ! the evil I have done ! ”

As we stood waiting for the brougham, I saw the wicked eyes of the Russian woman fixed upon us ; I heard her say quite aloud, and without the slightest affectation of reticence, to her Austrian cavalier —

“ Is it a comedy, or a Porte St. Martin drama, these mummers are acting for our diversion ? *Ma foi*—it is amusing, and I dare say it would be interesting, if one could only see the sin of it.

“ *Regardez cela, mon ami*—night and morning !

“ Those big swarthy savages always have a *penchant* for those horrible red-haired women. *Chacun à son goût*. Being fair myself I naturally adore dark men — not exactly black—one must draw the line somewhere, you know—suppose we say the Maharajah. Now, Desdemona didn't draw the line—and

she came to grief in consequence. All the same, I bet a dozen pairs of gloves (Houbigant's sixteen buttons) to a quill toothpick, that yonder Desdemona will have that huge, gaunt nigger after all!"

Thank God! my poor darling could not comprehend one syllable the creature uttered—but I stood, and writhed, and only wished the Austrian would afford me a decent pretext to shoot him—or, that his paramour had been a man, that I might have struck her to my feet! The Attaché, however, was wise in his generation, and remained discreetly undemonstrative, and so, with this wanton's ribald laughter still ringing in our ears, we returned to Florence Villa.

CHAPTER V.

FOUND!

“Too late! Terrible words, too late!”

NEXT morning—when I call early at Morley’s—I meet Clerehead in the ante-room. The moment he sees me he exclaims —

“Brain fever, by Jove! I’ve never had such trouble in my life as I’ve had with these country actresses of yours—and all about a man! *One* man too! If there were only one man in the world I could understand it perfectly. Well—well—every Jack, except me, has his Jill—sometimes half-a-dozen of

'em for that matter—but it isn't every Jill that gets her Jack. Here's this young idiot Frogmore going mooning mad over a woman, who would sooner have Jack Herbert, without a shilling or a shirt, than she'd have this duffer of a Duke, if every hair on his head was hung with diamonds as big as walnuts; and there's my poor little darling Milly—the best girl on the face of the earth—has lost her heart to him—and the ass don't see it! Don't talk to me—I've no patience with anything or anybody. But there, there! I must cut my stick, and alter the advertisements. 'The Challoner' won't be able to act this side of Christmas, that's certain—and 'The Judgment of Paris' must be postponed *sine die*. And look here, Bob, I got a facer last night. It's no use trying to look so innocent—you know all about it! I am out of the hunt at Florence Villa, but I bear you no malice, old man; stick to her, stick to her, and you are bound to win at last!"

Away he goes to see after his advertisements, while I drive to Regent's Park.

Mrs. Le Blanc tells me that Clara has passed the night in alternations of sobbing and sleeping, and wild exclamations about "intercepted letters."

For two days I oscillate betwixt Trafalgar Square and Florence Villa. Caroline is delirious, the doctor wants to cut off her hair; but Milly pleads so piteously to spare it that he gives in, and the beautiful raven tresses remain intact.

Mrs. Le Blanc has an important communication to make. For the past two days Clara has been confined to her bed; for the past two nights she has wandered in her sleep; she gets up and lights a candle; Mrs. Le Blanc, very much alarmed, naturally gets up and follows. She finds Clara at her desk in the drawing-room counting a packet of unopened but discoloured letters; she counts

them incessantly, beginning at one and ending at seven, and as incessantly reads the superscription, which, in most instances, is in a female hand, and runs thus —

“JOHN HERBERT, ESQ.,

“King’s Head Hotel,

“Kingstown.”

When she has counted them repeatedly, she returns them to the desk, locks it, returns to her chamber, muttering “Too late! too late!”

Being neither of us destitute of ordinary intelligence, we are not long in divining the truth. We both arrive at the conclusion that it is desirable, nay, even absolutely necessary, as a mere act of justice to Herbert, that Caroline should know the truth also.

Naturally I think that Mrs. Le Blanc had better break the ice herself.

She replies — “You know, Robert, how headstrong and impetuous she is. She may reproach me for playing the spy; she may

even leave me. Then what should I do?—what should I do? She is as an only child to me. I am growing old, and cannot live without her. She esteems you highly; she would not lose your esteem for the world, and sometimes I have dared to hope—but time will show. Meanwhile, you know I have always been your friend; be mine, be hers; she will listen to you; you don't know how much she likes you; speak to her, advise her, tell her that it is her duty—see, she is here! God give you strength and courage, for all our sakes!”

She leaves the room as Clara enters. She is pale and wan, her eyes fixed, her unkempt and abundant hair streaming down her shoulders over her white peignoir.

We meet with more than usual restraint, more than even usual embarrassment, and I leave her without daring even to broach the subject, far less to dictate a course of action.

When I arrive at Morley's Caroline is worse. Sir Henry tells me that her malady is that of a mind diseased, and all the physic in the pharmacopœia will do her no good.

"Mr. Penarvon," said he, "Miss Clerehead tells me you are Miss Challoner's oldest friend.

"Her life trembles in the balance.

"In her delirium she continually speaks of being stabbed by Roxana.

"Who, in the name of fate, is Roxana?

"Of a fire, in which she has been in great peril. Of Jack (whoever Jack may be), of his being ill; of a prison, in which he is, or has been immured, and of his having left her 'for that other one.'

"Of course, that 'other one' is a woman. Then she raves incessantly about some letters. Whether they have been sent to her, or whether she has sent them to someone—whether they have been intercepted or stolen I don't know. If you can find a clue to this

mystery you may, perhaps, save her life. I ought to tell you I fear she is subject to heart-disease ; another attack like this may prove fatal. I can do no more for her. Good morning."

I do not stop to think now ; had I done so, I could never have mustered courage to pass the ordeal which I knew awaited me at Florence Villa.

I drive back at once ; the door is open ; I rush into the drawing-room ; Clara is seated with her back to me, at her writing-desk ; she is counting those very letters, and is actually reading the address aloud —

"John Herbert, Esq., King's Head Hotel, Kingstown."

A moment's delay will prove fatal, so I plunge in at once.

"Those letters belong to John Herbert, and not to you, Miss Trevor!"

She springs to her feet, and the lid of the desk falls with a bang ; her eyes flash fire as

she confronts me, and hisses through her teeth —

“Spy! Traitor!”

“Insult me as you please; but for his sake, for hers, and, above all, for your own, listen!

“Caroline Challoner lies at death’s door! ’Twas she who wrote those letters. She believes that John Herbert received them; that he was base and unmanly enough never to have acknowledged them, by even one line. The belief in his perfidy and ingratitude is killing her. That weight of woe lifted from her heart, her life may be spared. If she dies, Clara Trevor, as sure as there is a heaven above us, her death will lie heavily at your door.”

She paused for a moment before she plucked forth the packet of letters, and cast it at my feet, as she exclaimed —

“As God is my judge, when these letters returned to my hands, eight-and-forty hours ago, I knew not where to find this woman. Go,

take them to her, doubtless she will reward your abject adoration. Possibly, since she cannot have the man she loves, she may be content to take him who has stooped to play the spy for her sake ! ”

“ I—a spy—I—oh ! Clara ! ”

“ Not another word, sir. Begone, and never darken my doors again.”

“ Miss Trevor ! ” said I, “ your secret is your own. If your heart does not dictate your course, all I can say will be idle. I will endeavour to forgive the cruel words you have uttered, although, I fear, I can never forget them. For the rest, though you may not esteem, you shall not despise me. I *will* never darken your doors again, so long as I live, until you ask me. But remember, even if I am at the other end of the world, should you ever need me, you have only to say one word, ‘ Come.’ And now I only hope that you may find a truer friend, a more devoted servant, than Robert Penarvon.”

And so I passed forth to the desolation which comes of despair.

What that proud heart suffered before it was subdued, Heaven only knows ; the nobler nature, however, triumphed at last, and an hour later, with eyes a-fire and cheeks a-flame, Clara Trevor dashed into Caroline Challoner's chamber and placed the fatal letters in her hands.

There was nothing to keep back, so in earnest and hurried words Clara told the simple truth.

I do not think there were two purer, better, nobler creatures on earth than these two women ; but after all, they were only women, not angels ; and the best of the sex, as far as my observation goes, are rarely or ever just, certainly never generous to each other, where a man stands between them.

The one was not so gracious as she might have been to her sometime rival, and she was

utterly unappreciative of the fact, that the other's generous but Quixotic effort to rescue my unfortunate friend from prison on the night of the tempest, had nearly cost her, her life.

Hence it was I suppose that Caroline replied, like a cold but implacable virgin martyr —

“When I have found him, I will forgive you ; but not till then.”

A hasty answer sprang to Clara's lips, but restraining herself she replied with quiet dignity —

“You might have spared me that, Miss Challoner. Ask yourself, hereafter, if it be just. The world is at your feet ; you have fame, fortune ; you know that he loves you, that you have only to lift your finger to call him to your side ; surely you can afford to be generous, to one who has failed, where you have succeeded. For me, God is merciful, and will, I hope, give me strength to bear

my burthen ; perhaps, in time, will teach me to be grateful to those who love me better—far better than I deserve ! ”

And so “ The Rival Queens ” parted never to meet again on earth.

CHAPTER VI.

BROWN—"NO. 5."

"Not age, but sorrow hath wrought this change in me."

ALTHOUGH at this period he had passed out of my mind altogether, I hope the reader has not entirely forgotten poor Jemmy Green the clown.

He was a hard-working and industrious little chap; and ever since Herbert had set him up in business, after the accident, he had never looked back. To say that he was eternally grateful to his benefactor, were to put the case a little too mildly. Herbert's name was on his lips with a blessing from morning

till night ; while Mrs. Green, who was a pious, little body, brought up her bairns to pray night and morning for “ father, and mother, and Captain Herbert.”

Jemmy was awfully cut up when he heard of Jack’s misfortunes ; but, as ill-luck would have it, he didn’t hear of the fire until three or four weeks after the occurrence. The very day he did hear of it, he consulted “ Liza,” drew out every shilling he had in the bank, for Jack’s use, and bolted down to Hillsboro’, where he unfortunately arrived just in time to be too late.

When the arrest took place, Jemmy was confined to his bed with rheumatism, and couldn’t put one limb before the other ; but as soon as he could pull himself together, he took the train to Bolingbroke. Still the same fatality—“ Too late !”

He enquired here, there, everywhere, consulted the theatrical journals, but could obtain

no clue to Herbert's whereabouts, and, indeed, his anxiety on this subject was a constant and abiding grief to the honest fellow, despite the fact that the world had prospered exceedingly with him. He had a capital and continually increasing business as a cabinet maker in Lisson Grove, where he kept two apprentices and five men in full swing.

Of course, he might have sat at home and smoked his pipe in peace, and enjoyed himself in the bosom of his family (which was continually increasing, too!), but, when Christmas came he could not keep out of the theatre, so just for occupation's sake he used to go to "Drury Lane" at night, to assist in the lime-light department.

Christmas had come, and the pantomime rehearsals were in full blast at "the Lane," but as yet Jemmy had not turned up, not being required until the scenic rehearsal, and Tom Smith (the renowned Signor Tomaso

Schmiderine), who was engaged as harlequin, was looking out anxiously for his old pantomimic pal, to whom he had important information to communicate—information obtained in the following manner.

One morning, while the business for the “supers” in the harlequinade was being arranged, the clown, Harry P—, said to the super-master —

“Giles, I have a very important bit of ‘business’ here. Can you let me have a dependable man?”

“Yes, sir,” says Giles, and, looking at his list, he calls out —

“No. 5, step this way.”

Out steps No. 5 from the front rank.

A tall, soldier-like man, with dark eyebrows and weird, melancholy eyes, and hair as white as snow—a seedy suit of black, buttoned up to the throat, shining tall hat, boots patched but polished, dark gloves very much darned—a gentleman, from the top of his poor

worn hat, to the sole of his broken-down boots.

"Here, sir," says "No. 5," giving a sort of military salute.

When Tom Smith heard that voice, it pierced his heart like a knife. He had never heard but one voice like that, in his life.

"Guv'nor, is that you?" he enquired, as soon as he recovered his breath.

"My name is Brown, sir," says "No. 5."

"Oh! Brown be blowed!" says Tom. "You're the captain or his ghost."

"Neither the one nor the other," says the gaunt man in black. "I'm simply Brown 'No. 5' at your service, gentlemen, and I'll do the best I can with anything you will entrust me with."

So there was an end of the conversation that morning.

"No. 5" had his 'business' allotted to him, and did it with a skill and dexterity not

usually found in gentlemen at eighteenpence or half-a-crown a night.

During the next three or four days, Tom tried to draw him out—nay, even suggested, with a certain amount of diffidence, that they should liquor up “round the corner,” but only met with a curt —

“No thanks, sir; not before dinner.”

Dinner, poor fellow! He looked as if he hadn’t dined for weeks!

At the first rehearsal, Tom noticed that “No. 5” appeared in delicate health, and every day, though punctual to the moment, he seemed to get weaker and weaker.

On Friday, after the rehearsal, “Mr. Brown” was strolling leisurely from the stage-door, under the Piazza, towards Covent Garden.

Simultaneously an open landau, yoked to a pair of spanking greys, was being driven up Catherine Street, from the Strand, towards the

box entrance. Beside the driver, who was a stylish young man, there sat a woman of distinguished appearance, closely veiled, and enveloped in sables.

Just as the carriage approached the vestibule of the theatre, and the driver was about to alight, Brown had reached the end of the Piazza. At this moment a runaway horse attached to a hansom cab, without a driver, careered wildly down Bow Street, over Russell Street, and bang down Catherine Street towards the Strand.

The two greys caught the alarm, threw their heads in the air and made a bolt, but they had calculated without "Mr. Brown."

At peril of his life, he threw himself before them, and hung on their reins like grim death. They dragged him across towards Covent Garden, but, before they had reached the bottom of Bow Street, they had found their master, and fell back upon their haunches, quivering and vanquished.

The young man jumped out of the carriage to thank his preserver. During the struggle the woman had never moved, but sat fixed as fate, calm and impassive, as if it made no earthly difference to her whether she were smashed or not.

The danger over, she lifted her veil mechanically. Mr. Brown lifted his hat; their eyes met; she started as if she had seen a ghost, vainly tried to speak, and fell back senseless.

The Duke, (for it was he,) looked from one to the other. "Mr. Brown" turned very white—white as his hair—stood for a moment irresolute, then bowed with grave politeness, walked rapidly up the Piazza, and disappeared within the stage door.

The lodge was empty, so he sat down in the porter's chair and coughed violently. When he withdrew his handkerchief it was stained with blood. He smiled curiously—and muttered—"So best."

Presently he picked himself up, as well as he could, crossed over Drury Lane, staggered down Kemble Street, and disappeared through one of the adjacent slums.

Meanwhile Caroline remained insensible, so there was nothing for it but to drive her home.

When she recovered, her first enquiry was —

"Where is he? Why doesn't he come?"

"Why doesn't *who* come?"

"He! he! the man who saved us."

"He went in at the stage door of Drury Lane," replied Frogmore; "that was the last I saw of him."

"Go! go! don't mind me; find him—bring him, Fred! For Heaven's sake," she almost screamed, "don't come back without him."

Without another word away went the Duke to Drury Lane—to consult the hall porter.

That important functionary vouchsafed the

information that "There was such a person as 'his Grace' had described, connected with the theatre. Pantomime was rehearsed to-night at seven. Would 'his Grace' call again?"

"His Grace" did call again, and again after that, on Saturday morning, but there was no sign of "Mr. Brown." "He would be sure, however, to be at the final rehearsal on Saturday night. Oh, yes, he was on the supers' list, 'Brown No. 5.'"

When the Duke brought back this news to Caroline, she was like a mad-woman. She raved, she stormed, and tore her hair, as she cried —

"What! He! He! the truest gentleman, the greatest actor in the world! He a 'super!' He herd with *canaille*! Impossible! it could not be!"

Every word she spoke, stabbed poor Frogmore, but he was thorough, staunch to the backbone, so he only plucked his huge, tawny moustache, and said —

"Look here, Carry, we don't know what may have happened. I'll go again to-night, and you shall go with me. Meanwhile I'll look up Penarvon, and get him to come with us. He knows all these people."

Poor lad! he remembered what followed for many a long day.

She dried her tears, took his hand, kissed it, and said —

"God bless you, Fred."

Then he left her alone with her great grief, and both waited anxiously for the night to come.

CHAPTER VII.

UNITED.

“ And have I found the lost again ?

Yes ! I with him at last am wed,

Where hearts are never rent in twain

And tears are never shed ! ” SCHILLER.

WHEN Tom Smith found “ No. 5 ” absent from rehearsal on Friday night and Saturday morning, his anxiety increased tenfold, and he, too, impatiently awaited the night’s rehearsal.

The transformation scene had to be “ set ” and lighted after the harlequinade, so of course Jemmy Green “ turned up ” at last with his indiarubber bags, his boards and

bull's-eye, elastic tubing, weights, and the rest of the "paraphernalia," as he called it.

As soon as Tom caught sight of his old chum, he bolted over to him, and eagerly communicated his suspicions as to the identity of "Mr. Brown."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Jemmy, dropping the "paraphernalia" in a heap on the stage. "Good-bye; I'm off!"

"Where to?" enquires Tom.

"Wherever he is in this village," shouts Jemmy. "You bet your bottom dollar on that!" and away he rushes to the super-master.

In an eager and excited manner he says, or rather shrieks —

"Mr. Giles, do you happen to know what's become o' 'No. 5,' and where he hangs out?"

"No, I don't, Jemmy," says Giles, "and what's more I don't think any o' my chaps does.

"Here, I say, lads, do any o' you know where 'Brown No. 5' roosts?"

"I should think somewhere in Buckingham Palace," roars out a Life Guardsman. "If he don't he orter, he's such a precious gentleman, he is!"

This graceful compliment elicits a yell of laughter.

"What for you laugh like zat?" enquires the good-natured ballet mistress, little Madame Folijambe, giving her fair but fractious pupils a rest for five minutes.

"Only because Giles axed the sweeps if they knew where a poor gent by the name o' Brown lived," says Jemmy, indignantly.

"Brown! Mistare Brown! What, ze knight of ze rueful countenance—ze *gentilhomme* vis ze beautiful vite air—Don Quixote, as zese graceless young monkeys call him?"

"Yes, poor fellow, that's the very gen'l'man we want."

"*Excusez-moi*," said Madame Folijambe,

then beckoning to a bright little *coryphée*—
“Fanny, *mon enfant*, tell Monsieur Jemmy
vere your Don Quixote ’ang out ’is flag.”

“Poor gentleman,” says Fanny, “he lives
where I live.”

“For goodness sake, m’m,” gasps Jemmy,
“let Fan come with us and show us the way.
It may be a matter of life and death.”

“*Avec plaisir. Allons ! Vite !* Off you
go, Fanny. I vill take your place till you
return, but mind you come back sharp,
ma chère.”

Away go Fanny, Tom, and Jemmy, scud-
ding across the stage like wild-fire.

“Stop ! stop !” roars the foreman of the
lime-light apparatus. “Here, I say, Jemmy,
what’s a-goin’ to become o’ them there bags
o’ yourn ?”

“Oh ! the bags be blanked !” roars Jemmy,
and in a minute’s time they are at the stage
door, literally cannoning against the Duke,
Caroline, and myself as we are about to enter.

Caroline grasps the situation in a moment. She knows Jemmy and Tom; indeed, she was in Castletown at the time of the accident.

Before I can get out a word she says —

“ Mr. Green—Mr. Smith—you know me ? ”

Jemmy growls —

“ Know you ? We ain’t likely to forget you. You’re the woman as *he* killed hisself for, you’re — ”

“ Never mind me, if you please,” she says, very gently. “ Where is *he* ?—that’s what I want to know.”

“ We’re a-goin’ to find him, and here’s Fanny Dexter a-goin’ to show us the way.”

“ Then jump in,” says Frogmore, pointing to the carriage, “ and you can talk as you go along.” Then he enquired of Fanny — “ Where shall we drive to, my dear ? ”

“ No. 29 $\frac{1}{2}$, Harwood’s Rents, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, sir,” she replied.

“ All right,” says the Duke ; “ in with you.

Come down, Holmes, I'll drive, and you can walk on. You, sir," to Tom Smith, "please jump up beside me."

Short as the drive was, Fanny found time to tell us how she became acquainted with her "dear Don Quixote."

It seems that one night, or rather one morning early, after a long rehearsal of the pantomime, the poor child was wending her way homeward, when she was waylaid by a prowler of the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade, who had accosted her more than once without waiting for the ceremony of an introduction, and who on this occasion was more pressing than polite. In fact, the fellow had got his arm round the girl, when, to his astonishment, he found himself taken by the neck and the breech, and landed in the gutter on the other side of Drury Lane.

With a quiet "Excuse me, you have made a slight mistake here, sir," and "Permit me,

my dear," " Mr. Brown " offered Fanny his arm, and escorted her home in safety.

" And now, m'm," says she, " comes the strangest part of the story. We had been living in the same house more nor a month, though neither of us knew it."

The girl continued to chatter away, unheeding and unheeded. Then all was silent, and we could hear nothing save the beating of our hearts, while we passed slowly up one slum, and down another.

Amidst the darkness and the silence Caroline muttered, impatiently —

" Shall we never get there ? "

At length the carriage stopped.

Frogmore leaped down and opened the door.

" Here we are," he said ; " jump out."

She sprang forth quickly ; the girl followed. Then I said to Caroline —

" We may be *de trop*, so I think we had better stay here till you send for us."

" Quite right, Bob," said the Duke. " We will stay here till morning if it is necessary."

Caroline took his hand and pressed it fervently ; then she shook hands with me, and, turning to Fanny, she said —

“ No words—no words, child—only lead the way. Quick ! quick, or we may be too late. Too late ! Oh ! no, no, not that ! ”

The alley was dimly lighted with one small lamp. Quickly as the girl fled up the noisome court, Caroline kept pace with her without faltering, until they reached an open doorway at the farther end.

Immediately opposite was a flight of dilapidated oaken stairs (with rudely-carved balusters), rising one above the other, seven stories high. A small paraffin lamp stood lighted on a projection in the corner. Fanny took it in her hand, and knocked at the first door on the ground floor.

A sleepy old crone, with a red petticoat thrown hastily over her shoulders, appeared. The girl enquired for “ Mr. Brown ; ” “ was anything the matter with him ? ”

The old woman mumbled "she raally didn't know—he always attended on hisself—she never knew when he was in or out. Oh! yes, a rale gen'l'man he was. Allays paid his rent—allays—that is to say, allays, 'cept last week. Could the lady see him? In course she could if she liked—but his room's seven stories high—and your feet's younger nor mine, Fanny—so s'pose you show the lady hup yourself."

Up they went, flight after flight, till they reached the summit of the house—an attic just beneath the roof; there was only one, so there could be no mistake about it.

"That will do—thank you, child."

"Shall I stay with you, lady?"

"No—no—I'll light you down, only go—go quickly."

She stamped her foot fiercely and said—

"Go I tell you—go! Stop! Tell those men not to come here, until I call them!"

As the girl disappeared in the darkness,

Caroline approached the door, and tapped gently.

No reply. She tapped again—still no answer. Then she entered the room. Immediately opposite was a window, through which the moonlight streamed clear as noontide ; to her right a small, empty, rusty fireplace, one chair, and a small table. Writing materials—a letter addressed to her, and one to me—an empty medicine bottle, and a lamp shedding a dim light around.

To her left, the bed—on which *He* lay, quite still and calm—the white face, on the white pillow, the abundant, curling, white hair, forming an aureole round the white brow—the eyes looking far, ever so far away.

For a moment she stood, as if spellbound—then the unforgotten voice murmured—as in a dream —

“Caroline—come back to me ! Come back, my darling ! Oh ! come back—before I die.”

With a wild cry of mingled grief and joy she flew towards him. She lifted him in her arms—she pressed him to her heart—she kissed his brow, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips—she tried to breathe the vitality of her rich, ripe womanhood into his enfeebled life—she showered caresses and endearments upon him.

“Oh! Jack!” she cried, “I have waited so long for you—so long and so patiently—now that I have found you, don’t leave me. Dear God! don’t let him die—not for my sake; I know I am not worthy of him, but for his own! Oh! Jack! Jack! my prince! my king of men! My darling! live—oh! live for me!”

“Carry,” he said, and the old music trembled through his voice, “I was very proud, and very wicked—and God has punished me for doubting you—but now I am forgiven, for He has brought you back to me before I die.”

“No—no! Not that! For His dear love—don’t say that! You shall not die! No, no!”

“Hush! dear, Hush!” he said, and the poor white hand, thin almost to transparency, stole round her as he partially arose. “See, sweetheart.” And he placed his other hand in his bosom, as he drew forth the miniature she had given him in the old, happy time, long ago. The brilliants and the blue-black hair were twined around it still.

“It has never left me living—don’t let them take it from me when I am dead. Now let me ‘kiss you, love, as bridegroom kisses bride.’

“Ah! I am happy now!”

The moon sinks to rest behind the clouds.

The lamp flickers and goes out.

The bride and groom (are they not so?) are left alone; alone with silence and darkness—silence, dread and sinister—darkness awful and profound.

We wait and watch below, while the hours creep on with leaden feet.

Still silence and darkness.

Heavens ! will the day never dawn ?

At last. Hark ! hark !

The birds from near Gray's Inn, make glad the air with music, at sight of the new-born day. The sun, emerging from the Orient, sheds a misty, nebulous, radiance, over every land and every sea—over everything beneath the cope of heaven—from the palace of the prince, to the hovel of the beggar—penetrating everywhere with tremulous shades of tender azure, and delicate violet, which quicken presently to imperial purple, and leap at last into golden fire, lighting up earth, air, and sky, and flooding every nook and cranny of even that desolate chamber with God's blessed sunshine.

Beneath those radiant beams the lost glory of John Herbert's youth comes back, illumining his face with an angel's beauty.

He has passed from the darkness of the night, into the splendour of the eternal morning !

And Caroline ?

Hours later we found her, a smile upon her lips, her arms twined round his neck, in the last embrace of love and death.

In life they had been severed ; in death they were united.

EPILOGUE.

“ Oh, mighty Time! O! light days lightly fled,
Ye bear away all tears and griefs of ours.
But ye are pitiful, and never tread
Upon our faded flowers.”

HERMAN MERIVALE.

AT LAST !

“ By the rapture within us, the rapture around us,
By God who has made us, and love who hath crown'd us,
One sense, and one soul, we are blent, ne'er to sever,
For ever and ever ! For ever and ever ! ”

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

HEARTS bleed and break, men and women die, as we must die to-morrow, or the next day. Still, the great world moves on, ever changing, never resting, and the womb of the mighty mother, still teems with myriad ages of the great “ to be,” while we, poor insects of to-day, who deem that the eyes of the universe are fixed upon the ant heaps, midst which we breathe and have our being, move over to the infinite, and are forgotten.

Of all who flattered and beslavered John Herbert and Caroline Blake, a year ago, just half-a-dozen faithful hearts bewail their untimely fate to-day, as they bewailed them yesterday, as they will bewail them always.

Time, which stands still with no one, smites, with impartial hand, the monarch on his throne and —

“The poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.”

Amongst those who have “moved over” to the “pale magician” during the past year is Walton, the solicitor of Rosemount.

His life has been one long fraud, and the curses of the widow and the orphan have followed him to his dishonoured grave. One of the greatest sufferers by his villainy is Clara Trevor, whom he has robbed of her inheritance. She is left penniless. Notwithstanding this calamity, the society journals announce that “having succeeded

to a large fortune from a distant relative she has retired from the profession of which she was so distinguished an ornament, and will act no more."

Whence the fortune comes from, she knows not; but *I* do.

With the exception of a few trifling legacies, Caroline, by her will, bequeathed her entire estate, real and personal, to Herbert, should he survive her; failing him, the property was to revert to me; failing me, to the General Theatrical Fund.

With the aid of Messrs. Pearpoint, I have devised a pious fraud (the only fraud that eminent firm has ever connived at!), by means of which half of Caroline's fortune has been settled on Clara. The legacy has not been bequeathed in Caroline's name though. I fear Clara would starve sooner than be indebted to wealth from such a source.

The legator is supposed to be some distant relative of Fairfax's, recently deceased, in Japan.

What is it Evelyn says in the play? —

“ And she owes it all to me, and doesn't even guess it ; to me, the poor scholar, whose hand she rejected, whose love she despised ! There's some spite in that ! ”

Bronson sent me word some ten months ago, that Brown and his wife were amongst Walton's victims.

The hoary scoundrel had swindled these poor old creatures out of the savings of a lifetime, and nothing was before them but the workhouse.

On receipt of the news, I wired to Fred to let them have whatever they wanted, and to arrange with old Titus, the station-master, to pack them off to town at once ; and here they are, keeping house for me.

Like all the rest of us, they don't grow younger, but they do their best ; and, after all, it is pleasant to have people near me, who, for so long a time, were near Her—and—my friend and benefactor, Fairfax.

Mrs. Brown goes to Regent's Park every

Sunday, and “her ashes live in their wonted fires;” for every succeeding visit supplies her with abundant food for conversation during the remainder of the week.

Shall I confess it? Yes!

I’ve grown rather to look forward to these disconnected gossips, in which the past is mixed up with the present, and the future.

I like to listen to the garrulous, honest, old soul.

She is certainly not the rose; but she has been near the rose—and that is the next best thing.

I have kept my word. For a year—a whole weary, dreary year—I have never been to Florence Villa.

I have seen Her often, though she has never seen me. She seems much changed—not in her beauty, for that is more imperial than ever. She is not the Clara of old though: her demeanour is sad, and the old brightness

and joyousness appear to have passed away. She has been chastened by suffering.

Mrs. Le Blanc and I are still excellent good friends. She is free of my chambers, and when she is in town, she often drops in for a cup of my famous tea. She always talks of *Her*, and constantly urges me to renew my visits.

One day she is particularly pressing. She alleges that Clara would be more than glad to see me ; but she is so proud that she cannot make the first advance.

I answer —

“ ‘ Her pride is yet no mate for mine.’ Besides, I’ve really no time. I am going to America.”

Mrs. Le Blanc is positively startled.

“ Going to America ! ” she gasps.

“ Yes,” I reply. “ I’ve been very seedy of late, and the doctor prescribes a sea voyage. Besides, I can kill two birds with one stone—

produce my new drama here, and in the States simultaneously, and so ensure the copyright in both countries. My berth is already taken in the *Nebraska*; she makes the passage in nine days, and sails from Liverpool on Friday next."

There is an awkward pause for a moment; then Mrs. Le Blanc insinuates, pleadingly—

"Surely, Robert, you'll come and say good-bye."

"I say good-bye now, dear Laura. Bless you for all your care and kindness to me, and to—to *Her*!"

"And you really mean to leave the country?"

"Yes."

"But perhaps you may be shipwrecked, or drowned, and we, I mean *she*, would never see you again."

"Much she'd care about that."

Then she bursts out—

"How stupid you men are! Do you mean

to say that you've the inhumanity, the positive barbarity, to leave the country without a word to the poor thing?"

"That word is for her to speak!"

"Very well, very well; I've done. Mind! I don't say 'good-bye;' I won't say 'good-bye!' Great Shakesperian scholar as you are, I suppose you never met with these two lines in your researches —

" 'Have you not heard it said full oft
A woman's nay doth stand for naught?'

I've no patience with you, Robert Penarvon. For a clever man, you are the greatest goose I ever met in the whole course of my life."

With this she flounces out of the room, leaving me to my dreams.

"Could she have spoken truly? Could Clara —"

While I am building castles in the air, Clerehead bounces in upon me with Frogmore—just returned from Egypt with his regiment.

The lad is as brown as an Arab, and as lean as a greyhound—for he has had hard times of it out there. They've made a man of him, however, and it is pleasant to hear his cheery voice in my lonely room, to feel his honest fist once more; but both our eyes grow dim as we think of "the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still."

We chat a little about current events, then he says —

"Bob, look here, you know. Milly and I were spliced ten days ago! You may well look flabbergasted! The pater here would have it done on the quiet, you know, or I should have had you for my best man.

"Next week we're going abroad for a month or two. Milly would like to run down to Cornwall before we leave; she's fixed on Wednesday, and you're to go with us, and that's about the size of it."

"Very sorry," I replied, "but I sail for

America on Friday, and I have my baggage and my outfit to look after."

"Now, Bob," said Clerehead, "that isn't friendly. Milly will be awfully cut up if you don't go; in fact, she'll take no excuse--will she, Fred?"

"Certainly not," responded Frogmore.

"Very well then," I replied; "I'll send my traps on to-morrow, and, as we come back from Penzance, I'll leave you at Bristol, and go straight on to Liverpool."

"Oh! that be hanged!" said Clerehead; "we'll go down to Liverpool with you, and see the last of you--won't we, Fred? Train leaves Paddington Wednesday morning at six-thirty, sharp, so make a note of it. I'll bring a basket of prog, a hamper of wine, and plenty of 'baccy."

"Now mind, Bob, I shall tell Milly she may expect you," said the Duke, and away they went.

I devoted all the next day to my prepara-

tions, and arranged for Brown to meet me at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, on Thursday night.

I went to bed early (at ten o'clock, I think), so as to make sure of the morning, but I couldn't sleep a moment, for the thought that I was leaving the land in which *she* lived, that perhaps I should never see her again.

The tardy hours crept on; at length it struck two.

I sprang out of bed, feverish and unrefreshed, pulled the string of the shower-bath to cool my burning brain; in vain, it throbbed more wildly than before. I slipped on my clothes, rushed into the Strand, hailed the first cab, and drove to Florence Villa. I bade the man wait, while I walked round and round the nest, in which my bird lay sleeping—dreaming perhaps.

Did she ever dream of me, during the nights and nights, I have watched and waited through the cold, through the rain,

through the snow, hoping only to catch a glimpse of her shadow as it fled by. Psha! What matters? In a few hours we shall be parted for ever, and she—oh! no—not another's—not another's! I couldn't bear that!

I drive back to my chambers more feverish, more unrefreshed, than when I started.

Again to bed. I plunge and toss and turn; at last, of course, when I ought to get up, I am overpowered with a stupor of sleep. Brown has a difficulty in waking me, and has almost to drag me out of bed.

I dress mechanically, swallow a cup of coffee, and start for Paddington, behind a poor struggling horse that has been out all night, and breaks down on the way.

Though I have abandoned all hope of catching the train, I take another cab, and promise cabby double fare, if I am in time.

Clerehead is waiting at the central entrance puffing his everlasting cigarette.

"Pretty fellow you are!" he bursts out ;
"Good job it's a special, or you'd have been left behind."

"A special to Penzance!" I exclaimed.
"Good heavens! do you know what it will cost?"

"Deuce a bit; I neither know nor care. The 'boy' pays for all," so saying, he bundles me into a carriage almost atop of the "boy."

A lovely day, but a tiresome, tedious journey, though we only stop three or four times on the road. The Duke and his father-in law smoke, and chatter incessantly ; for once, I can't even smoke. By-and-bye they get lunch ready, and press me to join them, but in vain. I nibble a biscuit, sip a glass of claret, and subside into silence. They give me up as a bad job, and return to their infernal cackle. Gabble, gabble! how they do gabble! The Colinderies—Ascot—

the Derby—the Boat Race—Faust—the Pictures—Home Rule—the Land—Split in the Liberal Party—the last Murder—the the latest Divorce—Egypt—the Sick Man—Bulgaria—the Everlasting Eastern Question—and Heaven knows what else.

Penzance at last ! They jump out first.

As I reach the platform I encounter Milly, who gushes at me, and then creeps up to Frogmore, coyly taking his arm, and asserting a kind of proprietary right in him, which he doesn't appear to dislike.

As they move away, turning round to get my rugs, I am confronted face to face by Mrs. Le Blanc and—Clara !

I lift my hat. They each drop me a stately bow in return, but vouchsafe no further recognition.

Clerehead comes bustling up, and says, in his jolliest manner —

“Now, good people—carriages waiting—not a moment to lose, if we are to reach Trepolyia before dark.” Then, offering his arm to Mrs. Le Blanc, “Allow me, madam! Bob, you’ll see after Miss Trevor.”

We are alone. She moves towards the carriage. I walk beside her. She doesn’t utter one word; no more do I.

Decidedly I am glad that I leave England on Friday!

In two minutes, we are stowed away, the men in one carriage, the ladies in the other.

At length we stop before the churchyard of a little Cornish village, lying almost at the edge of the sea.

A tall, stalwart man, clad in black, with hair and beard of iron grey, and a great grizzled giant, who, unmistakably, has been a soldier in his time, await us at the gate. They are the Vicar and the sexton. We alight and bow to them.

I (for, alas! I have been here before!) shake hands with the Vicar. Clerehead and Frogmore bow, throw away their cigars, and assist the ladies to alight.

One thing strikes me as being strange, but not incongruous. Although a year and more have elapsed since—since—we are all in deep mourning.

Though we are in mourning, Nature is keeping holiday. What a heavenly prospect opens before us; how venerable is the old church, almost embowered in ivy, woodbine, honeysuckle, Virginia creepers, and the sweet-smelling clematis. The setting sun bathes in ever-changing beauty the stately trees, rare flowers, and choice shrubs which deck the spot “where the fathers of the village hamlet sleep.”

This very day—this very hour—the flowers seem to have leaped into life. Masses of rich ripe rhododendrons and delicate lilacs

are relieved here and there by stately sycamores, luxuriant yews, and cypress, the various tints of which serve to throw the more glowing colours into vivid contrast. The yellow laburnum fills the perfumed air, with flakes of golden fire, while, high above the rest, towers a magnificent horse-chestnut, glorious with the beauty of its ripened bloom. And, hark! hark! there is a whole grove of feathered songsters quiring a jubilate!

Happy the dead who rest in this lovely solitude, far away from the clamour and squalor of the mighty city—far away from its ignoble cares, and yet more ignoble strife. Here, when the end comes, may I, too, sleep my last sleep, beside the friends I love the best.

The Vicar leads the way down the central avenue, overshadowed with huge elms. We follow, until we reach an opening beyond.

Before us, in the very centre of God's acre, three tombstones, which stand side by side,

cast their shadows on three graves, embedded with living flowers of rarest beauty.

High above, from an eminence at the back towers a Corinthian column of white marble, beautifully flecked with black streaks. It is shattered at the summit, as if it had been cleft with a thunder-bolt. At its base lie two broken laurel wreaths, also carved in marble, encircling this inscription in letters of gold :—

“ IN MEMORY
OF
A CONSTANT WOMAN, AND AN HONEST MAN.
THIS SHAFT WAS PLACED HERE
BY THEIR FRIEND
JAMES CLEREHEAD,
WHO LOVED THEM LIVING, AND WHO MOURNS THEM DEAD.”

The following epitaphs are on the tombstones.

On the one to our right :—

“ TO THE HONOR'D MEMORY OF
THE BEST OF MOTHERS,
THIS MEMORIAL IS INSCRIBED BY HER SON,
JOHN HERBERT.”

On the one to the left :—

“ IN MEMORIAM.

CAROLINE BLAKE,

DAUGHTER OF THE HON. AND REVEREND PHILIP BLAKE

(A.M., TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN),

ERECTED BY HER SORROWING FRIENDS,

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS VERE,

AND MILLICENT HIS WIFE

(*Duke and Duchess of Frogmore*).

“ ‘ Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter rages,
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages.’ ”

On the central tombstone, which stands a little higher than the other two, these words are inscribed :—

“ SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN HERBERT,

GENTLEMAN.

IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF HIS BENEFACTOR,

THIS STONE WAS ERRECTED BY

JAMES GREEN, OF LISSON GROVE, LONDON.”

“ ‘ His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world—

This was a Man ! ’ ’ ”

Clara has two laurel wreaths.

The one she places on *His* grave, the other upon *Hers*. Then, sinking on her knees, she makes the sign of the sacred symbol on her brow.

Mrs. Le Blanc murmurs audibly, the words of Longfellow —

“Dust thou art, to dust returneth,
Ne’er was spoken of the soul.”

As Clerehead strolls out, he mutters half unconsciously, “Poor Carry! Poor Jack! as their blessed Bard says,

‘They should have died hereafter!’”

Then Milly breaks down, and Fred leads her away. Mrs. Le Blanc raises Clara from the ground, and they too pass silently and sadly forth—the Vicar and the sexton follow.

I remain alone with the dead. Yes—quite alone.

She has left me without one word, one sign, one look. A few hours more, the sea

will be between us, and perchance I may never look upon her face, or hear her voice again.

I was mad to dream that she, in the splendour of her beauty, the affluence of her genius, could ever bestow a passing thought on me—me, whose brow is furrowed with care—whose hair is already sprinkled with snow—me, who am old before my time—yes, old, and worn, and broken, hopeless, friendless, and alone ; yes, henceforth always alone !

Up to this moment I had dared to hope ; but now — !

In my despair and desolation I bow my weary head upon the stone which marks poor Jack's grave, then, utterly unmanned, I break down and weep—yes, weep like a child.

Am I awake or am I dreaming ?

A soft arm steals around my neck—a soft cheek nestles against mine—a soft voice murmurs in my ear —

“No—not alone, Robert. Never alone again so long as I live!”

I feel her heart beating against my own, her loving lips on mine.

Ah! then I know it is no dream, it is reality!

Not life, nor death, nor time, nay, not eternity itself, can ever recall those loving words, or steal those kisses from my lips!

The sun, red as blood, rushes down the west, flooding sky, and sea, and shore, with his burning beams, then vanishes into the coming gloom.

As yet my heart is too full for words.

All is silent.

The corncrake has ceased to croak, the frogs in yonder pool are still, even the nightingale has ceased to sing.

At last my darling murmurs softly —

“Robert—night has fallen, and see, darkness is gathering o’er the deep.”

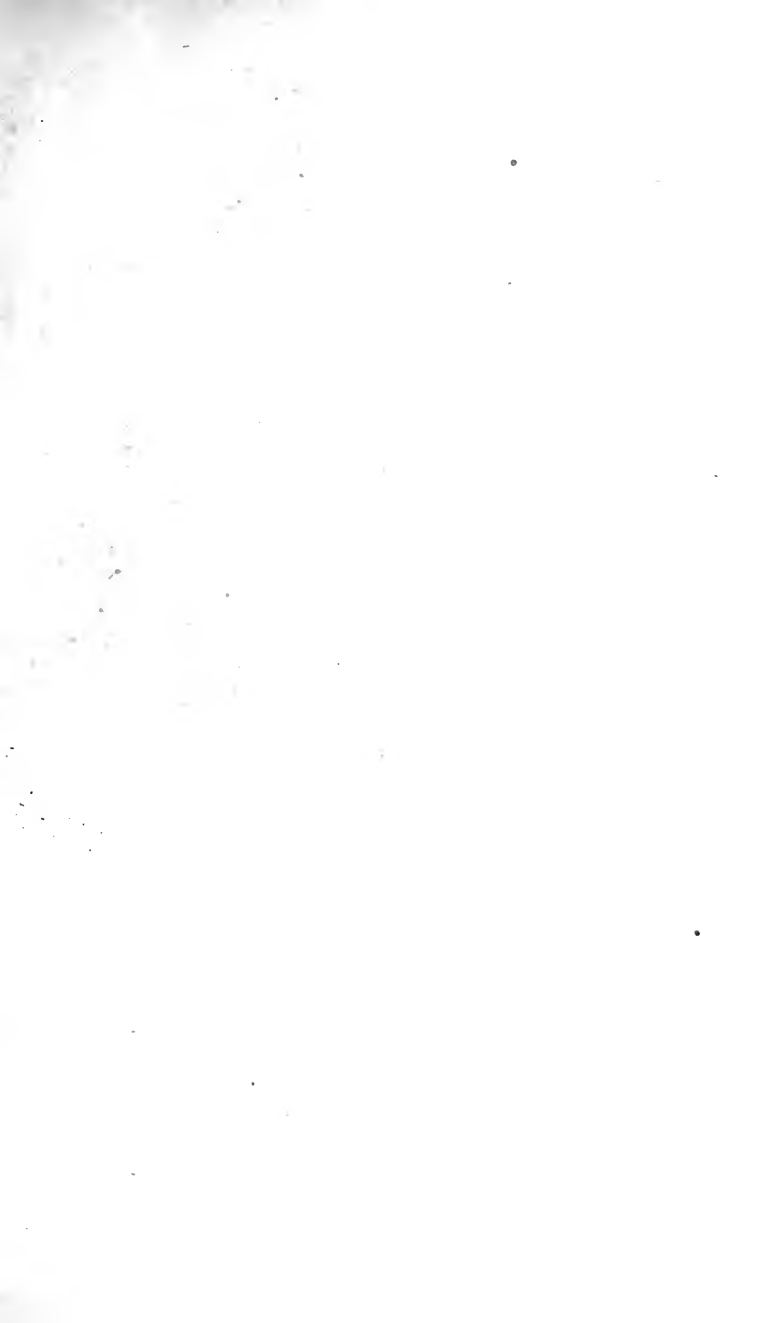
I make answer —

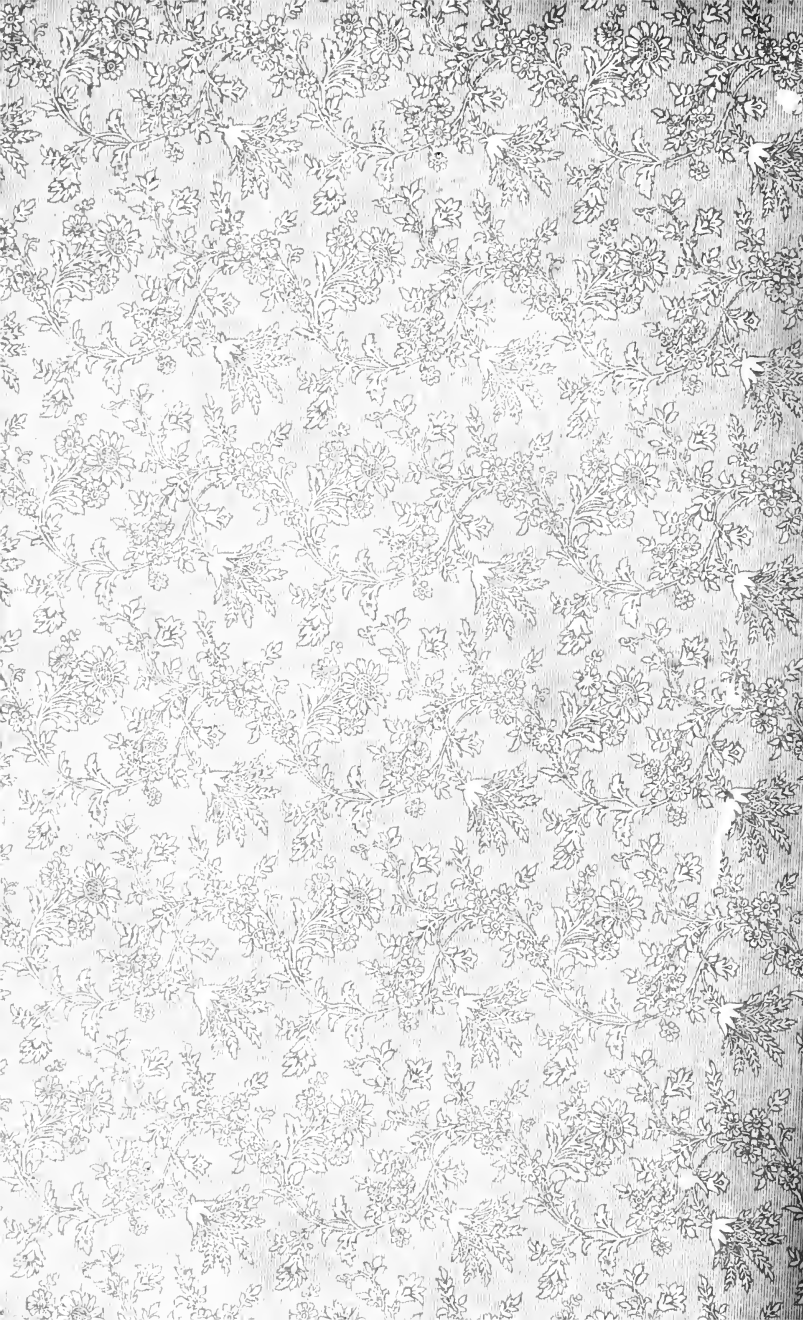
“ Oh ! Hush ! hush ! Darkness can never come where you are, light of my life, my own now, and evermore ! ”

Even as I spoke, as if in answer to my words, the moon rose bright and clear, and the stars came out in countless myriads, glittering like a vast coronal of jewels on the boundless brow of night.

And thus, hand to hand, and heart to heart, we passed forth, outward and onward, and home—never to part again, please God, so long as life shall last !

THE END.





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